International Journal of Philosophical Studies Vol. 15(4), 617–638

Book Reviews

Moral Animals: Ideals and Constraints in Moral Theory
By Catherine Wilson
Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2004. Pp. xvi + 316. ISBN 0–19–926767–7. £35.00 (hbk).

Catherine Wilson, now a professor at the City University of New York, is largely known for her writings on early modern metaphysics and philosophy of science (including books on Leibniz and Descartes). *Moral Animals* is her first book-length treatment of topics in moral theory and social and political philosophy. The book has two ambitious aims: a metaethical aim, to provide an account of moral judgment and moral theorizing; and a moral aim, to defend egalitarianism, specifically to argue in favour of greater socio-economic and gender equality. The first half of the book provides the meta-ethics that allows for the advancement of the arguments for equality in the second half.

According to Wilson, morality is unique to *Homo sapiens*. Animals do not rise to having moral rules, which are essentially rules that reduce individual advantage: '*Moral rules are restrictive and prohibitory rules whose function is to counteract the short- or long-term advantage possessed by a naturally or situationally favoured subject*' (p. 9; italics in original). A moral rule compensates for inequalities that allow individuals to dominate weaker individuals, and is egalitarian in essence. A rule such as *Torture children* is not a moral rule at all, since it does not reduce my advantage over others. If it is converted into a judgment, such as *You ought to torture children*, it likewise follows that this judgment is 'not a moral judgment at all', rather than 'an example of a moral judgment that happens to be false' (p. 10). I have no problem with this account of moral rules, although I do not consider it to be as innocent an account as Wilson does. She says that she intends her account of morality to be 'non-committal as between moral theories' (p. 8), but it has the result that ethical egoism is simply not a moral theory at all. It also, as she admits, eliminates purely self-regarding moral rules – that is, duties to oneself – from morality (p. 16).

Wilson rejects moral realism, 'understood as the strong claim that every moral judgment is either true or false' (pp. 40–1). Nevertheless, she holds that certain moral judgments can be 'confirmed', and 'Confirmed statements can even be regarded (though I will avoid this locution) as "true"'

International Journal of Philosophical Studies
ISSN 0967–2559 print 1466–4542 online
http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals
DOI: 10.1080/09672550701655302

(p. 43). This must be explained. Every moral rule is translatable into a moral judgment. For example, *Do not torture persons* is translatable into *It is morally wrong to torture persons*. Every moral judgment is a description of how agents relevantly similar to us – 'The Reality Constraint' – behave faithfully – 'The Idealism Characteristic' – in a 'paraworld' (p. 49). For example, *It is morally wrong to torture persons* means *In paraworld X, agents relevantly similar to us do not torture each other*. This is what Wilson means when she says that 'The semantics of ought statements are ... irreducibly modal' (p. 51). It is also what she means when she says that moral judgments have 'representational ... content' (p. 61). For someone to assent to a moral judgment is for someone to prefer the paraworld it describes in this respect to other paraworlds that it does not describe. Hence, 'moral judgments, on this view, represent preferences, as non-cognitivists maintain, or more precisely, elections' (p. 61). A moral judgment is confirmed when all competent judges prefer the paraworld it describes in this respect to other paraworlds that it does not describe. For example, *It is morally wrong to torture persons* is confirmed when all competent persons prefer paraworld *X*, where the relevantly similar agents do not torture each other, to other paraworlds in which they do torture each other. More generally, 'moral theories project paraworlds' (p. 62), and a moral theory, say, *M*, is confirmed when the paraworld it describes, say, *W*, is preferred by all competent judges to other paraworlds that it does not describe. The competent judges in question do not have to be 'ideal observers' (p. 69) who have all the relevant knowledge, and are not required 'to agree on or to stipulate the criteria by which "betterness" is to be judged, only on betterness itself' (p. 61). In providing this account of what happens when moral judgments are made and moral theories are advanced, Wilson understands herself to be simply providing a description of what is going on all the time: 'My concern here is merely to give a non-normative philosophical account of how the notion of paraworld betterness is employed by rival moral theorists' (p. 61).

I am not sure how accurate or helpful this redescription of moral theorizing is. The Idealism Characteristic strikes me as redundant, and may well be mis-named. All talk about actors behaving 'in an ideal fashion' (p. 49) unfortunately connotes the morally ideal, even though, as the author admits, there is nothing necessarily morally ideal about acting faithfully in a certain way. The Reality Constraint may be much too restrictive. Wilson's description of it seems innocuous enough: actors in the paraworld described by the moral judgment or theory 'are endowed with the motives, preferences, levels of rationality, and overall aims and purposes' that we actually have (p. 49). Later she says that a 'disposition to partiality' (p. 149) on the part of the actors in the paraworld is part of the Reality Constraint on moral theorizing. This seems to be its true meaning: by nature, people are not impartial. However, the Reality Constraint must not be so restrictive that it

prevents impartial rules and theories, even extremely impartial rules and theories, from being moral rules or theories at all, as opposed to ones that are not confirmed, otherwise too many moral philosophers are not engaged in moral theorizing.

Wilson does hold that 'high-demand' moral rules and moral theories are 'very difficult to confirm' (p. 89) and that 'prescriptive moral theorists must take into account the relationship between the formulas of obligation they advance and our ordinary or average capacities. A confirmed theory *M* cannot consist of formulas of obligation that are so exigent that only heroes, ascetics, omniscient beings, or persons devoid of worldly ambition, can do what is morally required of them' (p. 93). For example, if a moral theory has the moral rule *Never lie*, or the moral rule *Donate all income other than what is required for subsistence to charity*, then it cannot be confirmed, since only moral saints never lie or send all their income not required for subsistence to charity. Neither Kantianism nor utilitarianism can be confirmed, according to Wilson, because these moral theories are too demanding for beings like us. They violate a principle of 'descriptive moral psychology', namely, 'The Heavy Costs Principle', according to which the more difficult the obligation created by a moral rule is to fulfil, the more its authority is weakened (p. 86). Lest this must-not-be-too-demanding-for-beings-like-us constraint on confirmation be misinterpreted as a recipe for never confirming any progressive moral theorizing, Wilson attacks the metaethical position she names 'immanentism', according to which the task of the moral philosopher is simply to 'make visible and understandable the moral aspects of particular ways of life', and not to propose 'better moral theories that capture our obligations more accurately' (p. 97). (It seems that Wilson must mean by 'that capture our obligations more accurately' nothing more than: that are confirmed). In the course of this attack, virtue theory, the most conservative of the Big Three moral theories, gets its come-uppance for not being demanding enough: 'Virtue theory contains a bias towards moral neglect simply on account of its relatively narrow focus' (p. 122). To counteract this privileged bias, Wilson argues for an 'anonymity requirement' (p. 126), which entails that 'I cannot prefer a set of rules *R* to a set of rules *R′* because *R* contains rules that work to my advantage, or to the advantage of my family, my class, or my country' (p. 129). Note that the anonymity requirement is not the same as the demand to be completely impartial. It is not a violation of the anonymity requirement to prefer the rule *Save one's own children rather than those of strangers* to the rule *Toss a coin as to whether to save one's children or those of strangers*. It is a violation of this requirement, however, to prefer the rule *Save the rich people's children over the poor people's children*, or *Save the Irish children rather than the Rwandan children*.

Wilson also introduces three further principles 'of moral psychology' (p. 153) that counteract the Heavy Costs Principle, insofar as they tend to

strengthen the authority of any obligation (derived from a moral rule) that is demanding. If the heavy costs are the results of advantages unfairly gained – the 'Ill-Gotten Gains Principle' – or the result of an agreement knowingly entered into – the 'Contract Principle' – or the result of the person having false beliefs that she shouldn't have – the 'Culpable Ignorance Principle' (however, since being ignorant is not the same as having a false belief, this principle may be misnamed) – then the authority of the demanding obligation is strengthened (p. 154). It is at this juncture that Wilson also considers the question of the authority of morality, and argues that:

> The claim that moral considerations do not have automatic priority ... can be taken to mean that we humans sometimes disregard moral considerations or refuse to take them into account and that this is also a good feature of our world. A promise to help someone move furniture can be broken in favour of a once-in-a-lifetime chance for box seats at the opera; established habits of service and sacrifice can be abandoned in order to have an emotionally meaningful life. Worlds in which everyone cares more about morality than anything else are unfit for our habitation.
>
> (p. 159)

This argument is question-begging. If the person whom you have promised to help that day needs the help that day, and there is no one else who can help, then, *ceteris paribus*, it is immoral for you to break the promise and go to the opera. Hence, it is not a good feature of our world that you disregard or refuse to take into account the moral consideration that you have promised to help someone, as you consider going to the opera instead of helping your friend. Alternatively, the moral rule about keeping promises is: *Keep your promises, so long as circumstances do not change in such a way as to release you from your promise.* It is possible that serendipitously acquiring opera tickets that can only be used on a particular day can release one from a promise to help on that day. If this does indeed release one from the promise, then one has observed the moral rule about keeping promises if one goes to the opera. Either way, it can be argued, morality has automatic priority over self-interest, and it is not a good feature of our world that we sometimes disregard moral considerations or refuse to take them into account. I am also suspicious of the terminology of 'weakening the obligation' (p. 154), strengthening the obligation, etc. It is one thing to say that because one unfairly gained an advantage over someone, one has an obligation to do or refrain from doing something that one would not otherwise have. It is another thing to say that because one unfairly gained an advantage over someone, one's obligation to do or refrain from doing something is strengthened. The latter language seems unduly subjective. More

generally, I am worried about referring to what appear to be controversial moral considerations (e.g., the Culpable Ignorance Principle) as principles 'of moral psychology', such that they cannot even be contested.

With the prolegomenon of metaethics complete, Wilson turns her hand to prescriptive social and political philosophy – to projecting her own para-world, as it were. First she argues for a 'qualified egalitarianism' (p. 163). As against the likes of David Gauthier, Wilson argues that simply eliminating theft, deception, etc., from the marketplace is not 'morally adequate' (p. 209). People can still enter into voluntary cooperative arrangements that allow one party to dominate another (p. 182). Hence, there need to be procedures to 'regulate and police their cooperative arrangements to dissuade agents from making and accepting the bad bargains they otherwise would' (p. 210). Regulation of procedures is not sufficient, however, since even with such regulations in place accumulated resources can allow eventually for significant disparities in wealth between people. There must also be redistribution of wealth on the basis of need and, to a much lesser extent, merit. Wilson's combined proposal is that everyone's 'first-tier' needs – food, water, shelter, medicine, etc. – and 'second-tier' needs – 'some variety and pleasure in food, drink, furnishings or ornaments, the opportunity to engage in meaningful work and to advance one's knowledge and understanding, along with opportunities for affiliation, mobility, some choice of mates, and freedom from harassment and derogation' (p. 244) – must be met. Then, 'in a condition in which we have more than is required to meet first and second-tier needs universally' (p. 245), the surplus wealth should be distributed according to merit, where 'merit' includes 'the passive possession of qualities deemed admirable', 'the active performance of tasks that require strength and effort', and 'the exercise of coordinated specialist knowledge and effort' (p. 213). This concession to merit, however, is premised on the idea that merit is the least evil basis for surplus redistribution. Wilson rejects Rawls's proposal for redistributing surplus wealth according to a 'ranking in which the relatively worst-off are first, and the relatively best-off are last' (p. 245), regardless of merit. As she says, 'it is unclear why, once needs are universally met, the relatively worst-off, who are no longer in a condition of objective deprivation, should continue to be favoured' (p. 246). She also rejects the strict egalitarianism of distributing surplus wealth equally, regardless of merit. Against the objection that her combined proposal is too demanding, she says that the 'thirty million top income earners (who are not of course the most meritorious persons) could bring about this result by redistributing less than 10 percent of their salaries' (p. 247). If this is correct, then this sacrifice is surely not exigent, and it is surely pure selfishness to refuse to give up even this much of one's earnings. Peter Singer and Peter Unger could be happy with Wilson's combined proposal.

The final chapter of *Moral Animals* argues that male–female relations should be a topic of all moral and political theory. Even in 'the wealthiest

and most rights-conscious nations', it is still the case that women exist 'in a condition of subordination', and men benefit from that subordination (p. 258). Wilson engages with the literature of evolutionary psychology (formerly known as sociobiology, before that name was tainted), which credits the traits of women's smaller size and lesser strength, their ability to bear children, their greater receptivity to infants, their greater patience, and their lower level of interest in status as the causes of their subordination (p. 273). Her conclusion is that, even if it were granted that women have some, or all, of these traits, it does not 'justify the current state of the world' (p. 274). The 'subordination of women is not natural' (p. 276), and it remains for moral theorists to advance proposals for greater equality for women 'in light of the reality constraint and the idealism characteristic' (p. 277). She considers but rejects 'The argument from heavy costs', according to which transferring 'a large proportion of the holdings, liberties, and cultural and intellectual authority of men over to women would be disruptive of reasonably comfortable and efficient modes of life and traumatic for both sexes' (p. 279). She argues, very quickly, that in any case 'Male advantage reflects the enjoyment of ill-gotten gains; implies the violation of an implicit contract to cooperate for mutual benefit; and is the product of increasingly culpable ignorance' (p. 283). Although she insists that 'a fifty-fifty division of babyminding might be unacceptably burdensome for most men and unacceptably anxiety-provoking in most women' (pp. 290–1), she holds that 'men stand under a moral obligation to divert some proportion of their energies from productive and directive activities to maintenance and uncompensated' activities (p. 289), and 'some proportion of funds' must be diverted to 'childcare provisions for mothers in the active world' (p. 290). Again, it can hardly be maintained that this sacrifice is exigent.

Whether or not the specific arguments for socio-economic and gender equality are accepted, it is interesting to see how the model of moral theorizing works in these cases. I will conclude with two minor points. First, when Wilson rejects 'Emotivism', she describes it as the metaethical theory according to which '"Ought statements" ... are ... equivalent to declarative statements about what the assertor likes, admires, or prefers' (p. 50). This makes emotivism out to be a descriptivist theory (a form of individual subjectivism), according to which 'moral judgements have truth-makers in this world' (p. 50). This is not emotivism, however. Emotivism is the metathical theory according to which ethical judgments are the expressions of ethical emotions, and these ethical emotions are *sui generis* and may clash with what a person likes. Secondly, Wilson is ill served by Clarendon Press. The book's relatively short bibliography manages to mix up authors and publications in several places, including mixing up Bernard Williams's publications with Wilson's.

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Scepticism Comes Alive
By Bryan Frances
Oxford University Press, 2005. Pp. x + 209. ISBN 0–19–928213–7. £40.00 (hbk).

Scepticism, as well as having the property of stubborn longevity, seems to be a philosophical standpoint that is particularly well suited to being recast in new forms. Of course, it's a separate question whether any recasting is a genuine one or a presentation of old wine in new bottles. In this work, Bryan Frances manages to recast the sceptical threat in a manner that is undeniably distinct from previous incarnations and which can't be easily assimilated to previous sceptical challenges. It's an enjoyable read, and more importantly, required reading for anyone concerned with the varieties of sceptical challenge on offer in contemporary epistemology.

The central idea concerns our epistemic modesty regarding prevalent scientific and philosophical theories. As 'mere mortals', without mastery of various fields, we accept central accounts of commonly accepted knowledge by capitulation to the opinions of experts. Occasionally, though, we can become aware of challenges to the scientific orthodoxy which we ourselves are not in a position to rule out. In such cases, those hypotheses become 'live' with respect to our knowledge store – they constitute new and relevant epistemic threats that must be neutralized if that knowledge store is to be restored.

After an introductory chapter, Frances details in Chapter 2 the nature of the 'ruling out' activity that this scepticism will concern. Frances's distaste for 'wild' sceptical hypotheses is reflected in his lack of interest in 'purely' epistemic matters. The focus of Frances's scepticism will be upon threats to the vast stores of socio-epistemic warrant that we conventionally assume ourselves to have acquired.

Chapter 3 details the procedure that generates the sceptical attacks on our knowledge, which involves claims regarding recognition of when a hypothesis is live and when a member of a community lacks the extraordinary capabilities required to rule out live challenges for himself. Chapter 4 details the first live sceptical hypothesis, appealing to the liveness of eliminativism regarding beliefs. Frances doesn't claim that eliminativism is true, or even that it is actually live, but rather that its potential liveness in a relatively nearby possible world is sufficient to generate the sceptical threat. In Chapter 5, Frances introduces some other sceptical hypotheses, focusing on colour error theory as clear example of a live, plausible sceptical challenge to our knowledge claims regarding coloured objects. Chapter 6 details more of the characteristic features of live scepticism, including the vital claim that those who are unaware of the liveness of a sceptical challenge to certain knowledge claims retain all the warrant for those claims.

In Chapter 7, Frances shows how a variation of universal scepticism may be plugged into the framework outlined, therefore transforming particular live sceptical threats regarding belief, colour, etc., into a scepticism that claims that 'certain classes of mortals fail to know anything at all' (p. 107). In Chapter 8, Frances rightly emphasizes the unsatisfactory aspect of epistemological theories that succeed in demonstrating that we regularly attain knowledge at the cost of jettisoning from our conception of knowledge something that is appropriately thought to inform and enrich that conception. In Chapter 9, Frances examines a range of potential anti-sceptical challenges. While finding that none of them undermines live scepticism, he does claim that reflection on this fact does seriously weaken the threat of traditional brains-in-vats scepticism. Chapter 10 considers various ways in which live scepticism might be disarmed. In Chapter 11, eight possible counter-arguments that might be employed to show that live sceptical hypotheses actually fail to offer serious threats are considered and found wanting. In Chapter 12, Frances considers alternative means of disarming the sceptic, either, on the one hand, through appeals to sensitivity or safety, or, on the other hand, through an extreme form of externalism or through appeal to the 'tenacity' of knowledge claims. In the final chapter Frances offers some concluding reflections on the status of live scepticism.

In this work Frances outlines a range of arguments and defences in regard to live scepticism that seemed to me to be always plausible and often convincing. The few comments I have here don't directly concern the primary value of the work, which is the wealth of specific claims in regard to different sceptical hypotheses and their standing. I have instead some very minor quibbles with some of Frances's characterizations of traditional scepticism. The major insight, it seems to me, is that if we reasonably consider the nature of sceptical threats from a socio-epistemological perspective, then mere logical possibility becomes only one, and moreover a very minor one, of a large amount of varied factors that contribute to the significance, relevance, or seriousness of sceptical threats. Considered from this perspective, new radically sceptical challenges jump to the foreground of our epistemic attention while others recede. The brains-in-vats challenge, for instance, recedes considerably. This, to put it very crudely, is the sense in which Frances's scepticism (by which I mean his account of scepticism, since Frances himself, although president of the club, is not a member) provides a genuinely new form of radical sceptical challenge.

Given the obvious differences between live scepticism and traditional scepticism, it is easy to overstate the distinctness of some of the other features of Frances's account. If we were to give a glib statement of the core claim of the radical sceptic, it would be that nobody knows anything. This universal pessimism espoused by the radical sceptic can be read in several different ways, however. Frances holds that this kind of scepticism has three central features, roughly that it is 'a sceptical predicament that lasts for ever,

applies to everyone, and indicates a cognitive deficiency of its victims' (p. 113). This characterization of traditional radical scepticism is important for Frances since live scepticism is in part characterized by the fact that it holds none of these features.

However, it's easy to overstate how much the traditional radical sceptic (even the amorphous fictional character) was in fact committed to these three central features. It has always been vital for any respectable sceptic to have the resources to avoid being labelled a dogmatic pessimist in regard to our knowledge claims. This avoidance of dogmatism has usually demanded qualification of the nature of the sceptic's claims. First of all, the sceptic can't claim that his sceptical conclusions are ever-lasting; the sceptic is also a devout fallibilist, and has to claim that, for all he knows, scepticism might be proven wrong tomorrow and knowledge thereby attained, but until that time, the responsible attitude is to deny that anyone knows anything.

Similarly, the sceptical conclusions apply to everyone just because the sceptic has reached those conclusions by employing the critical and argumentative standards that everyone uses – it's always been vital for the sceptic's dialectic that his conclusions have been reached through the more general and thorough-going employment of epistemic tools generally thought acceptable. The sceptic thus assumes that his conclusions ought to apply to everyone who thinks those epistemic tools acceptable. Again, though, he is open to challenge on this score – it could be the case that someone might be able to employ these tools consistently without falling into sceptical doubt, and if so, the sceptic would like to be shown how it is done.

This leads to the final central feature of traditional radical scepticism, that the victim of scepticism is thought to be in an epistemically inferior position to non-sceptics. Now, it's surely the case that the traditional sceptic has always regarded his position as superior in some way to that of the one who is unaware of the traditional sceptic's arguments. There's a clear difference between having an epistemically secure position and an epistemically superior position – it's taken for granted surely even by non-sceptics that improving the epistemic standard of one's inquiries may not inevitably lead to an improvement in the epistemic security of one's beliefs. A core feature of live scepticism is the claim that the person for whom a sceptical hypothesis is live is in a superior epistemic position to one unaware of the cogency of that sceptical hypothesis (p. 82). I think, though, that any scepticism worth its salt has always claimed this.

A curious feature of Frances's attitude towards scepticism concerns the motivation for recasting the threat in the way he does. Frances shares many epistemologists' discomfort with the nature of radical sceptical hypotheses – they are undeniably 'weird', involving outlandish hypothetical scenarios which seem to have the property of lacking any positive reason to suppose that they might actually obtain whilst also seeming to deny any optimism regarding our ability to rule out their logical possibility. How we react to

these common intuitions might be thought to be one way of categorizing the variety of epistemological projects currently in vogue.

Frances's reaction is that there is something to these common intuitions but that it is a lesson that it behoves the sceptic to address. Fundamentally, the sceptic must strive to counter the intuition of the impropriety of his sceptical hypotheses by offering sceptical hypotheses that are 'live' – scientifically respectable, empirically testable, and 'immune to irrelevancy objections' (p. 5). Of course, the assumption of this approach is that there is something cogent regarding our intuitions about the irrelevancy of the sceptical threat. However, it is notoriously difficult to spell out how the intuition of irrelevancy might be transformed into an argument for the *actual* irrelevancy of such sceptical threats since the reference to scientifically respectable beliefs and practices can be characterized as an appeal to *ad hoc* assumptions that beg the question against the sceptic. A central motivation for Frances's approach then is that it would avoid an objection from our irrelevancy intuitions against scepticism, yet it's far from clear to me what this objection might amount to against 'traditional' radical scepticism.

One needn't dwell on these considerations, though, since Frances offers a compelling second wave of sceptical hypotheses that may very well be immune to such charges of irrelevancy. Frances's approach hinges crucially on the habitual practice of the acceptance of expert testimony and the self-recognition of epistemic modesty that crosses every discipline and form of inquiry, and there's no denying the power of such an approach. Frances's book is a detailed and engaging exploration of some of the factors that determine our consideration of epistemic challenges and is highly recommended reading.

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Ignorance of Language
By Michael Devitt
Oxford University Press, 2006. Pp. xiii + 320. ISBN 0–19–925096–0. £32.00 (hbk).

This book is an attempt to put onto the right footing our thinking about language and how it relates to thought and the mind, and in particular to challenge the Chomskian doctrine that there is an innate, dedicated language module in the mind, to be studied by linguistics, the rules of whose operation are tacitly or unconsciously known by all competent speakers of a language. The kind of knowledge of language Chomskian linguistics is said to attribute to speakers is propositional representational knowledge of the

grammatical structural rules underlying linguistic competence (I'll return to this). On the contrary, argues Devitt, speakers may be wholly ignorant of the structural rules governing their language (hence the book's title). Linguistic competence does not require that speakers even tacitly know these rules.

As Devitt understands it, Chomskian linguistics sees its job as revealing what linguistic knowledge consists in and how that knowledge is acquired. On the basis of statements like 'there can be little doubt that knowing a language involves internal representation of a generative procedure' (Chomsky, 1991, cited by Devitt, p. 4), Devitt attributes to Chomsky the 'Representational Thesis': 'A speaker of a language stands in an unconscious or tacit propositional attitude to the rules or principles of the language which are represented in her language faculty' (p. 4). Much of Devitt's book consists in enumerating reasons to deny the representational thesis, and he concludes that 'there is no significant evidence for the Representational Thesis and given what we know it is implausible' (p. 84). Devitt prepares us for this conclusion by drawing a number of useful distinctions. We should distinguish a theory of a competence from a theory of the outputs of the competence (e.g. a theory of how to paint well from a theory of what makes paintings good, or more controversially, a theory of the psychological processes underlying linguistic competence from a theory of linguistic structure (a grammar)). The process rules described by theories of the competence must *respect* the structure rules described by the theories of the output of the competence. Devitt calls this the Respect Constraint. Another way to put the Representational Thesis Devitt attributes to Chomsky is as the belief that when it comes to linguistic competence, the process rules meet the Respect Constraint because they employ representations of the structure rules. Devitt argues forcefully that this is a mistake. He urges us to adopt 'Pylyshyn's Razor': representations should not be postulated to explain features of a system that can be explained without them.

The focus on the Representational Thesis leaves Devitt open to the charge that he is attacking a straw man. He is sensitive to this ('interpreting Chomsky is not my major concern' (p. 7)). When it comes to representation, it seems that Chomsky cannot or will not recognize a distinction between following a rule and merely conforming to it, and so regards the question of whether the rules of language are psychologically real as a spurious question: 'I do not see what differentiates "psychological reality" from some other kind of reality: say chemical, optical or neural reality' (Chomsky in Anthony and Hornstein (eds) *Chomsky and his Critics*, Blackwell, 2003, p. 283); 'As to whether [the] I-language is "really *represented*" that depends on what one means by "represented"' (ibid., p. 285). Both quotations are from Chomsky's response to Georges Rey, who pressed him, before Devitt, on the matter of psychological reality. Linguists *must* clear this up, and cannot defend their use of 'representation' by saying that it's a technical

sense, because if their 'representation' of rules is simply what philosophers mean by reliably conforming to them, then Chomsky et al. are not entitled to claim to resurrect Rationalism. That debate is over innate *ideas*. Even the metaphorical *tabula rasa* has properties to begin with, such as a flat surface to write on etc. The crucial matter is whether there are ideas written on it ab initio. In any case, even if Chomsky himself avoids the full brunt of Devitt's attack, Devitt finds targets among cognitive scientists such as Fodor, Bever, and Garrett (pp. 72–6); Bresnan and Kaplan (pp. 76–9); Berwick and Weinberg (pp. 79–81); and Matthews (pp. 81–3), who he argues all subscribe to the Representational Thesis. For this reason, his discussion of the Representational Thesis is useful anyway.

Devitt unquestionably does engage with Chomskian linguistics over the claim that linguistics is a part of psychology. Devitt believes that we should instead take grammars to be true of linguistic reality. To make his case Devitt needs to say what linguistic reality is. Chomsky is doubtful whether any scientific purpose can be much served by the notion of public and shared language independent of and external to particular speakers (see, e.g., his *New Horizons*, Cambridge, 2000). Devitt only waves his hands in the direction of a nominalist account of language. The linguistic reality is the output of a linguistic competence (p. 25). This output is a collection of actual (and possible) physical sentence tokens governed by linguistic rules (p. 26). The rules have to be high-level relational properties of tokens, not brute-causal intrinsic ones (p. 27), because linguistic tokens can be sounds, inscriptions on various media, gestures, and so forth, which have little or nothing in common at the brute-causal level. That is pretty much all he says. But nominally isolating a group of things, such as linguistic tokens, doesn't begin to show that they constitute a scientifically interesting real kind. Some explanation should be offered of their coherence and integrity and of the patterns running through them. Even if one dislikes Chomsky's biolinguistic explanation of grammatical structure, at least that would be an explanation. Why can we say 'John told Mary the truth', for example, but not 'John reported Mary the truth'? Why can we both ask what the time is and wonder what the time is, but while we can ask the time, we can't wonder the time? In what sense are these examples violations of anything? These facts call for appeal to more than simple statistical regularities among the linguistic tokens, it would seem, since some ungrammatical sentences will occur more frequently than grammatical ones (for some perfectly grammatical sentences will never be uttered). Devitt's espoused nominalism leaves crucial questions unanswered.

Even putting the question of possible misreadings of Chomsky aside, there is a useful debate to be had over whether linguistic competence requires a dedicated linguistic module as opposed to general intelligence. The argument that it does, the 'poverty of stimulus' argument, points to various facts about the data available to a child learning its first language

and argues that the ease and facility with which all children, virtually regardless of intellectual ability, acquire language points to a dedicated faculty. More particularly, they say that the general methodology of learning by explicit hypothesis formation and testing would be insufficient to obtain competence (as is evidenced by the difficulties professional linguists face uncovering linguistic structure), so a dedicated faculty is needed. Devitt points out that this argument, attributed to Ray Jackendoff (p. 264), relies on the Representational Thesis. If linguistic structural rules are explicitly represented, then linguists' hypothesis formation (revision, retraction, etc.) and use of general knowledge (common sense, comparison, etc.) are an appropriate analogue to central processor general learning strategies, but if not, then not. Devitt himself accepts a watered-down version of linguistic nativism, namely the claim that humans can only learn languages that conform to certain grammatical principles. (He misleadingly calls this 'universal grammar', which is the Chomskian name for the language faculty.) He thinks that he can accept these constraints without conceding to a dedicated faculty because these constraints derive from constraints on the structure of thought in general (i.e. constraints on the operation of the central processor). I don't see how this can work. It is possible to devise 'impossible languages', i.e. languages that violate the principles of universal grammar (see, e.g., Smith, Tsimpli, and Ouhalla, 'Learning the Impossible', *Lingua*, 91 (1993), pp. 279–347). For instance, Smith, Tsimpli, and Ouhalla devised a language that contained expressions that violated the structure-dependence condition on natural languages. Obviously devising these languages draws on general intelligence and mathematical ability. But this seems inconsistent with Devitt's explanation of linguistic constraints as being as it were inherited from constraints on thought. If thought *were itself constrained* along the lines of universal grammar, how could anyone devise or even observe or understand patterns that violated these constraints?

Overall, the book is a rather uneven affair. It suffers because it does not wholly engage with Chomsky's position. It's not appropriate to present the book as a 'provocative challenge' (dust-jacket blurb) to Chomskian orthodoxy if accurate interpretation is not a 'major concern' (p. 7). The book certainly has the merit of forcefully pressing the issue of the representation of linguistic structure in an account of linguistic competence, but this needs to be more than an exercise in hypothetical philosophizing if it's to be fully satisfying.

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Camus and Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel that Ended It
By Ronald Aronson
University of Chicago Press, 2004. Pp. ix + 291. ISBN 0–226–02796–1. $19.00 (hbk).

Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre were firm and fast friends as well as being famous French philosophers, their names inextricably linked together in the intellectual and cultural life of post-war Paris. They first met in 1943 during the German occupation of France and became political allies on the Left. They were committed, engaged public intellectuals – philosophers as well as playwrights and novelists too. They were public spokesmen of their generation. But East–West tensions eventually strained their relationship and they began to evolve in different directions, disagreeing over both philosophy and politics. The rupture of their relationship happened at the height of the Cold War. A quarrel ended their love-friendship forever. They fell out in 1952 with a bitter and very public row, after which they never spoke again. Ronald Aronson's book, *Camus and Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel that Ended It*, published by the University of Chicago Press in 2004, is a brilliant biographical and passionately written account detailing the passions and fascinating lives that drove these two men and which finally tore them apart.

Sartre and Camus were attracted to each other and affected each other deeply; they remained entangled with each other even after their break-up. From 1938 to 1960, the year in which Camus died, they wrote to each other, about each other. They admired each other and were engaged in similar projects, straddling the disciplines of philosophy as well as literature. Thirty years after they met, Sartre remembered Camus as 'amusing: extremely coarse but often very amusing' (p. 17). Camus revealed his vulnerabilities to Sartre, those insecurities which could be seen in his moods and in his eyes. Their characters contrasted, complemented and completed each other. Simone de Beauvoir, Sartre's lifelong lover, wrote this about Camus: 'What I liked most about him was his capacity for detached amusement at people and things even while he was intensely occupied with his personal activities, pleasures, and friendships' (p. 19).

Sartre was strongly attracted to the handsome Camus while Camus was at once self-contained and vulnerable. Sartre fell considerably for Camus, and de Beauvoir described herself and Camus as being in competition for Sartre: 'We were like two dogs circling a bone' (p. 20). De Beauvoir was worried about this 'infatuation' (p. 20), but consoled herself with the thought that Sartre was strongly heterosexual with 'no trace of homosexuality in his disposition' (p. 20). If Freud is to be credited, however, there is a trace of bisexuality in every 'normal' neurotic. (En passant, we may note that the Camus–Sartre relationship has some parallels with the Freud–Jung one.) Throughout, Camus preserved his independence from Sartre, refusing to

become a satellite in the Sartre–Beauvoir 'family'. Much of their time was spent in talking about women rather than ideas. Sartre had many 'contingent' loves that were all subsidiary to his 'necessary' one for de Beauvoir, while Camus, though married to Francine, was in love with the actress Maria Casarès, the great, if tormented, love of Camus's life. Both men's energy was consumed in seducing women and in circumnavigating the complications of these endless affairs. The friendship with Camus was Sartre's sole close friendship with a peer. He would later describe Camus as 'my last good friend' (p. 4).

Both thinkers were stern critics of capitalism. However, Sartre embraced Communism and violence as a path to change and societal transformation, while Camus criticized both, putting friendship above politics. Camus said that he learned about freedom from poverty rather than from Marx, whereas Sartre, for his part, was engaged in more abstract theorizing.

Who was right, Sartre or Camus? Most sided against Camus at the time, just as Sartre and Camus sided against each other. Letters were exchanged. Sartre wrote: 'My Dear Camus: Our friendship was not easy, but I will miss it. If you end it today ...' (p. 147), but it didn't stop him, after the publication of Camus's *The Rebel*, writing in full public view, in *Les Temps Modernes*, of Camus's 'dreary conceit', 'dismal self-importance', 'inner problems', 'pomposity', 'character-disorder', 'wounded vanity' (pp. 147–9), etc. Sartre's reply was malicious and violent and utterly unjustified. Sartre ended his letter thus: 'In any case, it was good that I could tell you what I thought. The journal is open to you if you want to reply to me, but I will not reply to you further. I have said what you mean to me, and what you are to me now. But whatever you may say or do in return, I refuse to fight you. I hope that our silence will cause this polemic to be forgotten' (p. 154).

But Paris was abuzz. Camus was reeling and in shock; he was tearful too, and struggled to endure the break with Sartre without resentment. Their love had turned to hate – a conversion about which Freud writes with brilliant insight; but Sartre had denied the existence of an unconscious. Jacques Lacan, Freud's faithful French follower, had remarked that Sartre would have been a better philosopher if he had accepted its existence.

Sartre put politics above friendship; for Camus, personal loyalty would always come first. He was simply shattered by Sartre's scandalous treatment of him and never really recovered. A friend of both of them called the rupture between Sartre and Camus the 'end of a love story' (p. 159). Camus avoided public places associated with Sartre, his one-time 'brother' (p. 160). Sartre went on, seemingly unscathed. He put Camus out of his mind. In fact, Sartre never spoke of his former friend until after his death, when he would deliver a moving eulogy. But then, Sartre's friendships were always inconstant. Camus engaged in a Sisyphean struggle with silence but without hope.

The years after the break-up were the emptiest for Sartre as a writer, and Camus vegetated and admitted that he felt all dried up – 'like ink by a

blotting paper' (p. 177). But though the Camus–Sartre friendship was over, their relationship wasn't, as each man made references to the other indirectly in his writings. After a while, both returned to work and both were awarded the Nobel Prize for literature for their respective efforts.

On hearing of Camus's car crash and his untimely death on 4 January 1960, at the age of only 46, de Beauvoir described Camus as 'the companion of our hopeful years, whose open face laughed and smiled so easily, the young, ambitious writer, wild to enjoy life, its pleasures, its triumphs, and comradeship, friendship, love and happiness' (p. 216). Sartre, for his part, bade his public farewell to Camus, which was published three days later. Seven years had passed since their quarrel, and now Sartre included himself among 'all those who loved' (p. 216) Camus.

History has been kinder to Camus than to Sartre. Was each one half-right and half-wrong, as Aronson holds, mutually engaged in 'bad faith'? Well, Sartre survived Camus by twenty years and so had the last word; but better, in my view, to be wrong with Camus than right with Sartre. Aronson feels that both went very wrong. For both men, the choice was stark but simple. For Camus, it was a question of 'my mother or justice' (p. 232); for Sartre, there was no justice without violence. Camus or Sartre? Reform or revolution? Or perhaps both: an impossible Camus/Sartre composite? Whatever the answer to these questions may be, one thing is not doubted or disputed: their relationship, tossed and torn by the winds of history, continues to be relevant – their personal arguments, philosophical analyses, political actions, blind spots, egregious errors, welcome insights, continue to fascinate and to teach. Aronson's book, which charts the details of all this, is a riveting read and warmly recommended.

Let us leave Sartre with the last word – after all, he had made his life out of words, as even the title of his autobiography attests: *Les Mots – Words*. As we read Sartre's lines, we inevitably think about our own friendships – those that have endured and those that have ended, all our friendships, be they frail, fragile and fraught or fast and furious: 'We had quarrelled, he and I. A quarrel is nothing – even if you never see each other again – only another way of living together and not losing sight of each other in the narrow little world which is given us. That did not prevent me from thinking of him, from feeling his gaze upon the page of the book, upon the newspaper he was reading, and from asking myself: "What is he saying about it? What is he saying about it *at this moment*?"' (p. 164).

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Postphenomenology: A Critical Companion to Ihde
Edited by Evan Selinger
State University of New York Press, 2006. Pp. xi + 318. ISBN 0–7914–6788–0. £19.99 ($28.95) (pbk).

Postphenomenology presents a multi-stable American phenomenologist. Almost two dozen short articles present variations on Ihde's philosophy of experience, technology and science, and it turns out that the writers are unable (or unwilling) to give him a clear position. Ihde's breadth of interests is a liability when it comes to pinning down his legacy to the discipline of philosophy.

What is the basic characteristic of Ihde's position, to the extent that it can be pinned down? I agree with Albert Borgmann, who says that Ihde is the great mediator of contemporary philosophy, connecting phenomenology with postmodernism, and philosophy of technology with philosophy of science: 'From the start Ihde has been interested in what mediates between reality and humanity, more particularly how the materiality of the world comes across to the bodily beings we are' (p. 247). Ihde is an acute describer of action and perception, attending as carefully to the way humans experience and understand this materiality as to the qualities of that materiality itself.

This 'Critical Companion to Ihde' can be called a tribute book, and the genre has a long academic tradition. In Germany it would probably have been called a *Festschrift*. Some of these tributes are a collection of miscellaneous texts without connections between them. The tribute to Ihde is good in the sense that much of the book deals actively with his work, instead of everybody writing about their own current interests.

The editor, Evan Selinger, has written a good overview of Ihde's academic life from his student years in Kansas in the 1950s to his present status as a distinguished professor at Stony Brook University, Long Island. Selinger's introductory 'ihdeology' matches quite nicely Ihde's personal overview of his œuvre in the closing chapter.

Furthermore, Selinger has organized the contributions in a chapter structure that narrates Ihde's œuvre step by step. It starts with Ihde's personal style of writing, and goes on to focus on his early work in hermeneutics and phenomenology of perception, problems of normativity in technology research, and the role of bodies and technology in science. The book ends with a chapter in which Ihde responds to his critics; this 'ihdeology' corresponds with Selinger's introductory chapter, and infuses the book with a highly controlled argument. The reader is forced to review Don Ihde's life's work according to the schema laid out at the beginning and the end.

The contributions are of roughly two types. Some deal explicitly with Ihde's thinking, and critique or apply it in a dialogic way, for example Albert Borgmann's 'Mediating Between Science and Technology' and Carl Mitcham's 'From Phenomenology to Pragmatism: Using Technology

as an Instrument'. Other contributions deal with topics within Ihde's sphere of interests, but deal only implicitly with Ihde's philosophy, for example Peter Galison's 'Breakdown', about the invisibility of technology until it breaks down, and Donna Haraway's 'Crittercam: Compounding Eyes in NatureCultures', about animals making home movies with cameras attached to their backs. These articles seem to be donated out of courtesy, and while they are certainly rewarding in their own right, the 'dialogic' articles are definitely more relevant in a critical companion. The authors knew that Ihde was going to respond in the same book; and this give these articles more tension.

As already noted, this book contains a strong narrative about Ihde, and in the following I will discuss his career according to the three periods that Ihde and Selinger define: perceptual experience (1960s–1970s), human/technology relations (1970s–1990s) and techno-science (1990s–2000s). I draw heavily on the contributions to the *Critical Companion to Ihde* in this analysis.

Perceptual Experience

Ihde's interest in continental philosophy was kindled while he was still living in Kansas. From the early 1960s Ihde read classical phenomenology, mainly Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty; Merleau-Ponty in particular had a great influence on him. It les Ihde to stress the importance of the area around the body and our sensory-motor orientation in it to a quite radical extent. His approach resembles that of the perceptual psychologist J. J. Gibson in conceiving of this orientation as fundamental to human intentionality and cultural understanding. Our surroundings (including tools and other humans) are material forces that impinge upon us constantly. Ihde analysed this existential field during a long-evolving early phase that got its fullest expression in *Listening and Voice* (Ohio University Press, 1976) and *Experimental Phenomenology* (Putnam, 1976).

In the 1970s Ihde wrote about the experience of using technologies, of solving various tasks, by looking and listening in attentive ways. He focused on visual activities, introducing variational methods to disclose the multistability of visual perception, mainly in classroom experiments.

In *Listening and Voice* there is a novel and very valuable focus on the auditory dimension, on speaking and listening as crucial elements of being in the world. Ihde presents a complex theory of the temporal and spatial dimensions of sound (thing) and listening (human). Lenore Langsdorf in 'The Primacy of Listening' makes the interesting observation that Ihde reveals the communicative interaction that takes place between the subject and the auditory and visual things. They are external to us, constructed and constituted materially (record albums, a book), and 'they allow of variation while resisting our will that they exist in particular ways' (pp. 40–1). There

are limits to their malleability, and this makes them non-neutral, to introduce a crucial term in Ihde's philosophical vocabulary.

First conceived in this early phase, there is a lasting focus on situated, embodied activities in Ihde's work, a focus on the reflexive experience of actions and things. Vivian Sobchack's 'Simple Grounds: At Home in Experience' praises Ihde for his sensitive descriptions, and for the intelligent ways in which he engages his own personal life in his writing. It should be added that Ihde, as is typical of phenomenologists, sometimes overdoes the references to his own life and experiences.

Nevertheless, there is an analytic power to this early work that Ihde should have rekindled at a later stage. He could revisit the auditory and visual themes of communication in the context of technology, like Trevor Pinch in his contribution 'Voices in the Electronic Music Synthesizer: An Essay in Honor of Don Ihde'. Pinch analyses the functionality and musical uses of the Moog synthesizer, and Ihde could have written wonderful essays about the experience of such technologically charged expression.

Human/Technology Relations

When applying a historical perspective on Ihde's career, it is easy to detect a middle period starting with *Technics and Praxis* (Reidel Publishers, 1979) and ending with *Technology and the Lifeworld* (Indiana University Press, 1990). Now the technological character of modern life gets Ihde's full attention, albeit in a distinctly phenomenological and experience-oriented perspective. Ihde's interest in functionalities and the historical emergence of different scientific technologies grows more and more evident.

Carl Mitcham in 'From Phenomenology to Pragmatism: Using Technology as an Instrument' stresses the influence of John Dewey and the pragmatists on Ihde's philosophy at this stage. This is displayed in Ihde's focus on human–instrument relations. For example, Ihde analyses what he calls the 'amplification/reduction structures' in all technology relationships. The amplification tends to stand out, while the reduction tends to be overlooked. Along with other critical-analytic descriptions Ihde creates his own version of pragmatist technology theory, Mitcham argues.

One of Ihde's best-known ideas comes from this period, namely the distinction between three human/technology relations, that is, three ways in which humans are related to the world by way of technologies: embodiment relations (glasses), where the relationship to the world seems transparent and action is amplified directly; hermeneutical relations (a map), where the relationship to the world is a function of the skills you have at interpreting the materiality at hand; and alterity relations (a computer game), where the relationship with the technology constitutes the world in question.

Ihde describes the human skills required to learn about the world with instruments (telescopes, X-rays, charts, technical drawings, etc.), and the various sensory biases of these imaging technologies. He also describes the hermeneutical or interpretative relationships that people have with their technological surroundings, for example the layperson's attempt at fathoming the meaning of a CAT scan image.

Don Ihde should have been a communication philosopher. His focus on the auditory and visual dimension of experience fits nicely with modern developments in film, television and new media, and his readers have frequently seen him this way (for example Vivian Sobchack). His theory about technology-relations is highly fruitful when applied to the telephone, broadcasting and musical recording, for example. Ihde could have gone more into detail in concrete cases, and perhaps even have written a full history of certain technologies.

I have another regret regarding the lack of explicit communication philosophy in his work. Interestingly, there is a big unpublished manuscript about imaging technologies in Ihde's drawer, and I would very much like to see it in print. This would bring together historical analysis of the telescope, X-rays and other central imaging technologies, with an existential approach to the experience of using these technologies through history, for private and public purposes. Ihde could have taken up where Marshall McLuhan left off, to write a grand theory of the technological bias of communication – including the latest in ICT research and development.

Techno-science and Normativity

The first two phases of Ihde's œuvre, perceptual experience and human/technology-relations, are better defined than the current phase: techno-science. This phase is defined by a long series of loosely interconnected articles put together in books like *Bodies in Technology* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002) and *Chasing Technoscience* (Indiana University Press, 2003, edited with Evan Selinger).

Ihde's dialogue with the large field of science studies is somewhat strained. Andrew Pickering brings out his substantial disagreement with Ihde concerning the symmetry between humans and non-humans. Pickering refuses to allow humans a privileged position in the ontology, and disapproves of Ihde's 'human-centrism', and his 'cozy but claustrophobic realm of human embodiment' (p. 217). In Pickering's perspective Ihde comes across as an old-fashioned humanist, choosing a safe route into the future.

It is a long way from science and technology studies (STS) to Don Ihde's phenomenology, and it seems that several contributors from the former field shy away from encountering the differences. I side with Ihde on this. I don't agree with Pickering that a concern with putting humanity first is

such a bad thing. Indeed, this is a fundamentally normative matter. Humans are situated in so many ways (materially, socially, scientifically) that we can be reflexively aware of, and this the technologies are not. The priority of the embodied materiality called 'human' cannot easily be excluded from our analyses of science and its relationships.

Beyond defending this humanist position, Ihde remains largely descriptive in his philosophical ambitions. 'I'm not a dystopian (nor am I a utopian)', he says in *Bodies in Technology* (p. xiii). Ihde's favourite example for his normative position goes like this: he doesn't believe that a single best cuisine exists, but contends that one can judge the culinary quality within a certain cuisine. Selinger supports this view in 'Normative Phenomenology: Reflections on Ihde's Significant Nudging' (p. 92).

There is another tension between Ihde and his commentators in his perceived lack of political commitment. It seems that Ihde allows all things to exist equally, so that they cannot be compared for 'goodness'. Here Ihde is a kind of normative minimalist, and avoids problematic cases such as 'What would be the single best killing machine?' or 'What would be the most humane technology one could make?'

Carl Mitcham notes that Ihde's interest in socio-cultural reform has been less than what is typical of pragmatism, and that he could have done more to draw recommendations from his analyses (p. 31). Robert Scharff is sceptical about Ihde's 'strangely apolitical' enthusiasm. According to Scharff, Ihde has mostly dismissive names like 'romantic', 'nostalgic', 'utopian' for those who display less enthusiasm than he does for human–technology relations, or for those whose criticisms are overtly political (p. 132). In the same vein Albert Borgmann suggests that Ihde celebrates the richness that comes to the fore in multi-stability, and that this is 'a reflection of Ihde's sunny disposition, and his affirmative views of the bright side of technology are a much needed counterweight to the dystopianism he often complains about' (p. 252).

Despite the acknowledgement that Ihde works as a counterweight, I detect a certain scepticism about the latter period of Ihde's œuvre. The dialogue with STS seems to be less than successful, and Ihde's position on the important issue of normativity is not entirely accepted.

The Living Philosopher Speaks

The book has something definitive about it. It feels as if Ihde's legacy to American philosophy is wrapped up while he is still alive and working. I find this implication of the book slightly awkward. For good or bad; is this what he had to say?

The answer seems to be yes because of the final essay by Ihde himself, entitled 'Forty Years in the Wilderness'. Here he responds to the contributors' essays, and summarizes his thinking quite extensively and definitively.

For example, there is a subtitle, 'My Place in History', which, though it may be intended to be ironic, reads as a formulation of the 'official ihdeology'.

My conclusion is future-oriented. This book cannot remain the authoritative summary of Ihde's philosophy because of the very real presence of Ihde himself and his apprentice. Ihde's work can be interpreted and applied more directly in the world than it is by the meta-theoretical essays in this book do. We will only find out what Ihde's lasting contribution is by seeing what is deemed relevant by future philosophers. The impact of Ihde on contemporary philosophy and cultural studies remains to be seen.

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