

Remote Learning Module for 3 April 2020

Lecture Notes on Ian Hacking's *Rewriting the Soul*, Chapters 16-18

Having traced the lines of thought that transferred the meaning of trauma from somatic injury to psychological distress, last time, we then took stock of the sciences of memory, with reflections on how neurology, experimental psychology, and psychodynamics in the 19th century, and neurobiology and artificial intelligence in the 20th century, all form up into a surface knowledge—a *connaissance*—that takes for granted the *savoir* that memory is an object of study. Finally, we reviewed Hacking's argument for adding memoro-politics to Foucault's twin analyses of how *discipline* (anatomy-politics) and *control* (bio-politics) enmesh knowledge and power into an inextricable tangle of intersections. In the last three chapters of *Rewriting the Soul*, Hacking brings his archaeology to final fruition: first clearing the metaphysical ground, and then proceeding to show how both the diagnosis and the treatment of multiple personality disorder have together unleashed a paradox for memories of intentional actions—a paradox that raises the problem of false consciousness when souls are rewritten.

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Chapter 16: Mind and Body.

(1) We begin with the question: Does multiple personality matter to metaphysics? Hacking's answer is an unequivocal No. The essence of his contention is that multiplicity tells us nothing about the *nature* of human minds. Metaphysics asks: What is a self? What sort of thing am I? Metaphysics is indifferent to the question: Who am I?

This warrant is, however, somewhat thin (as we'll see in the next chapter, the answers to who-questions are structured by the available range of answers to what-questions). Hacking thickens up his reasoning, however, by further contending that the phenomena (doubling of the self, confronting alters, etc.) don't disclose anything useful to *natural* philosophy (presumably, this means neuroscience first and foremost), although it does disclose for *social* philosophy the elements and dynamics whereby communities make up people by creating social kinds.

(2) Advancing the argument further, Hacking presents an antinomy: multiplicity fails to provide evidence for any substantive metaphysical view about the nature of the self because the phenomena are consistent with, and may even serve to illustrate, *incompatible* theories. For example, Hacking cites Dennett and Humphrey's model, in which the unity of the self is an illusion: we are systems of subsystems on this view, without executive control, just spokespersons. Multiplicity makes perfect sense on this view. On the other hand, Braude's assertion that indexical reference over distinct alters entails the existence of a transcendental ego, so there must be an underlying unity after all. In fact, Hacking finds five rival theories that have a nice niche in which to allow multiplicity to flourish, so that none can gain any support from multiplicity for displacing the others.

(3) Turning from traditional metaphysics and its methods, Hacking wonders whether multiplicity might be of use in ordinary language philosophy and its focus on conceptual analysis (where attention is directed not to objects but to our concepts of objects). Wilkes, for instance, proposes that we look at *real people*, and asks how we are to conceive them (as reflected in how we talk). But, Hacking adduces, this approach presupposes that there are *facts* about real people that either fit and ramify, or fail to fit and challenge, our concepts. But facts have to be articulated; and we must use language to do this, and language is formed as much by literary imagination as scientific description, so that for the phenomenon of multiplicity, we have no facts, that is, no special class of facts-about-persons.

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Chapter 17: An Indeterminacy in the Past.

(1) Even if multiplicity won't advance the philosophy of science, philosophical analysis can help to advance clinical and social psychology. Hacking finds that Elizabeth Anscombe's analysis of intentional action can provide just such assistance for better understanding dissociative identity disorders.

(2) A clue from W. V. O. Quine's *Ontological Relativity*: in this work, Quine presents a compelling case for understanding the relation between words and their objects as subject to an indeterminacy from which there is no escape, nor recourse. In short: when we ask about what sorts of claims about the world can even be taken for candidate-facts, we are confined to a relativity of reference to conceptual scheme. A fine example of this sort of relativity can be had by comparing the conceptual frameworks within which 17th and 21st century medical models of infectious disease were/are constructed. Before microscopes, there were no facts about viruses; fevers were thought to be caused by an imbalance in the "four humors" regulating bodily function (blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile), so that in neither the diagnosis and nor the treatment of all manner of sickness, it was not possible to refer to viral causes. The meanings of referring terms are fixed *within* conceptual schemes, medical models, theoretical frameworks, etc. There simply is no external point of view.

(3) This is the kind of relativity of reference Anscombe analyzed in her work on intentionality and intentional actions. Consider the following sequence of attributions: (a) a person is moving a lever; (b) pumping water into a cistern; (c) thereby poisoning the occupants of a room; (d) who are evil people meeting for a planning session. In this scenario, one action is presented under various descriptions. Accordingly, we must distinguish among (i) acting with an intention, (ii) acting intentionally, and (iii) intending to act. In order for someone to be said to be acting intentionally, one must be performing an action *under a given description* such that one intends to act *under that description*.

(4) From this analysis, Hacking derives the following thesis: a person cannot intend to perform actions for which s/he has no description. Consequently, new descriptions make new actions possible. In the historical development of MPD, we find that a new descriptive vocabulary for talking about alters (switching, coming out, etc.) provided new options for being and acting. Just

as we can ascribe causes to viruses, although our ancestors in the 17th century could not, we can now ascribe actions to alters, although people in the 19th century could not: new kinds of intentional action have come into being in the interim.

(5) *Semantic contagion*: expanding concepts, like addiction or abuse, to cover new sorts of behavior or action can therefore open possibilities for evil as well as good. Once the concept of addiction, for example, is extended to things like nail-biting, more behaviors than before can be described as addictions, resulting in an entirely new kind of person—one with an “addictive personality.”

(6) The central thesis of this chapter is this: *Retroactive re-descriptions change the past*. Only later did it become true that in the past one performed an action under a description that was not available in the past. Only after the invention of the microscope did it become true that anthrax was caused by the anthrax bacillus. This example poses no serious worries for natural philosophy. But for moral philosophy, there is a deep problem: past actions and their moral significance become indeterminate. For Hacking, this returns us to a Freudian theme (although it’s worth noting that Augustine of Hippo, in the 4th century, was the first draw the relevant distinction): traumas divide between *natural evil* (disasters, infections, and the like), on the one hand, and *moral evil* (actions under a description), on the other hand. This is because it is the *intentionality* that both accounts for, and actually *causes*, psychological trauma.

(7) We find ourselves facing a paradox (about memories of intentional actions): Re-descriptions that are true *of* the past (that is, we can assert them of the past) were not true *in* the past (that is, the actions in view weren’t performed under our descriptions at all). To make sense of this paradox, Hacking proposes that its source lies with thinking about memory under the metaphor of narrative; the metaphor misleads us. Memory fits better under the metaphor of visualization: memories are sequences of scenes, and scenes can be painted and repainted, becoming more familiar, more populated, and thus scenes come to be re-described with colors that didn’t exist at the time of the original events. We have to be careful with this metaphor: remembering is not akin to looking through a window into the past; remembering is like painting scenes in the present.

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Chapter 18: False Consciousness.

(1) Hacking defines “false consciousness” as the state you are in if you have formed *importantly false beliefs* about your character and past. This definition provides, for moral philosophy, the following thesis: False consciousness is a bad state to be in.

(2) There are four species of false consciousness for Hacking:

- (a) *contrary-memory*: nothing of the sort ever happened;
- (b) *merely-false memory*: something happened, but the facts have been transposed;
- (c) *wrong-forgetting*: suppression of items, integral to one’s character, from one’s past; and
- (d) *deceptive-memory*: seeming memories or the absence of any memories at all.

False consciousness amounts to using deceptive, contrary, false memories to form one's character, one's self.

(3) The Moral Argument: *False consciousness is intrinsically bad* (not extrinsically, or consequentially bad). Hacking adduces the following argument in support of this conclusion.

(a) As regards what it is to be a fully developed and flourishing human being, our moral sensibilities are inherited; these sensibilities include:

- (i) *teleology*: we grow *towards* self-actualization;
- (ii) *nominalism*: our unique memories constitute our personal identities;
- (iii) *autonomy*: we are each *responsible* for the selves we create; and
- (iv) *memoro-politics*: persons are constituted by memories and identities.

(b) False consciousness frustrates all four of these sensibilities.

(4) Hacking completes his archaeological investigation with an admonition: autonomy is not comfortable. Self-knowledge (the original Socratic moral imperative) is a virtue in its own right, while false consciousness is contrary to the growth of the person, "contrary to what the philosophers call freedom: our best vision of what it is to be a human being."

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Next time, we'll begin raising a new set of applied philosophical questions concerning the relations between mind, matter and mathematics, where we'll encounter a fascinating confrontation between contemporary neurobiology and Platonic realism.

Be well everyone, and remember: social distancing saves lives, which is presumably why we are still not in JUB 202 presently.