

of Indian philosophy. It also emphasises the urgency to engage with Eastern schools of thought and break free of the lopsided emphasis on Anglophone and Eurocentric philosophising.

Swami Narasimhananda
Editor, *Prabuddha Bharata*



Philosophers of Our Times

Edited by Ted Honderich

Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP, UK. Website: <https://global.oup.com>. 2015. 384 pp. £21.99. HB. ISBN 9780198712503.

Reviewing Ted Honderich's anthology one understands why some of the Russell Group of universities had annihilated their philosophy departments. Honderich's book is an excellent place to begin understanding how stale and iterative most contemporary Western philosophers have become. This, notwithstanding Honderich's claim in his 'Introduction' (1–3): 'Philosophy in my [Honderich's] view is a greater concentration than that of science on the logic of ordinary intelligence—on clarity, consistency and validity, completeness, and generality' (2).

Accordingly, they can be understood by anyone interested in the hard questions of life: 'How is what it is like to be a bat related to the bat? [Obviously referring to Thomas Nagel's *What Is It Like to Be a Bat?* (1974)] ... Where did mind begin? With spiders? ... Is the problem of free will a solved problem of consciousness but a remaining problem for neurobiology? Are *you* a human being?' (1).

With these and other questions which are weird in the sense that S T Joshi (b. 1958) uses in another context, we begin a book meant to represent the best minds of our times. It is essential to mention the literary critic Joshi since bats, spiders, and being human are all dealt with by Joshi in his work on bats, spiders, and being human. Moreover, Honderich disdains literature. Thus the need to bring in Joshi's concept of the weird. In the name of clarity, we have Honderich mouthing unbeknownst to Honderich, strangely tricky questions. Honderich should

have begun his book by quoting the first scene of *Macbeth*.

Another problem with this book is that it has no lecture by any Indian philosopher or for that matter, by any Asian philosopher. Perhaps this is unconscious colonial erasure, or perhaps, even now, Indian philosophy is erroneously conflated with Indic religious studies. For instance, the work now being done by Jonardon Ganeri on medieval Indian logic and epistemology is paradigm-shifting, and Ganeri revises the domain of logic within philosophy. Despite this, Ganeri finds no mention in this book which asserts that 'If reading main-line philosophy is never like reading a novel, it is something you can be prepared for' (2). In his hurry to tutor us in the methods of reading 'main-line philosophy', Honderich demonstrates a lack of understanding of the rationality aimed at by philosophers by ignoring Asian philosophers and especially contemporary philosophers who are refashioning Hindu thought.

Philosophers included in this anthology range from Thomas Nagel, Simon Blackburn to Noam Chomsky. It is in passing that we should note that no foil to Western empiricism is possible through philosophy unless one brings Nyaya and Navya Nyaya into play. Honderich and his philosophers miss this focus on Nyaya and Navya Nyaya entirely and thus, Honderich's anthology cannot really claim to be representative of the state of either philosophy or philosophers now.

While rambling about philosophy in his 'Introduction', Honderich suddenly attacks the genre of the novel again: 'Reading all the lectures is reading mainstream philosophy, which is indeed unlike reading a novel or anything else. ... They demonstrate the falsehood, perhaps the hopeful falsehood, of the [anecdotal] utterance of a noted scientist that philosophy is dead, a scientist unaware of the truth among others that the subject has always buried its undertakers' (3).

Honderich's disparagement of the novel shows that he has not read anyone from Fyodor Dostoevsky to Iris Murdoch. Otherwise, he would not have made these weird comments regarding the novel-form. As will be seen, Honderich and his philosophers have become the undertakers

of their own discipline through jabberwocky-venom and nonsense. One wonders what Honderich means by mainstream philosophy when he has included the angry young man of philosophy, Chomsky in this weird anthology of ageing philosophers.

Tyler Burge's 'Perception: Where Mind Begins' (43–57) derives from Indic thought-systems. Burge reiterates the ideas of many Indian thinkers. One example will suffice. Burge's reflections on the non-sentient mind have their roots in the works of Acharya Umaswati's *Tattvartha Sutra's* chapters on the soul, an early Jain scripture traced to be between 2 CE and 5 CE. This is not to say that Burge's work is only based on the *Tattvartha Sutra*, but in its complacent but rational analysis of cognition within both sentient and non-sentient beings, Burge and Honderich who introduces Burge (41–2), do not have the humility to say anywhere that their arguments are not original. Here is Honderich on Burge:

We come finally to the answer to an initial question. In the scale of things from rocks to us, representation or representational mind begins with bees, spiders, locusts, and other arthropods. They are the simplest things to exhibit perceptual representation, including constancies.

Implicit in all this is the conviction that there can be perception without consciousness, and that we don't know where on the scale consciousness as distinct from representation begins. The lecture is an instance of the lecturer's resistance to over-intellectualizing in philosophy. If it is to me philosophy understood as concentration on ordinary logic, it is also an instance of what can non-pejoratively be called a scientizing of philosophy. Psychology figures large in it, and its initial question is indeed a question that is at home in the theory of evolution, wherever else it may turn up. (42)

The initial question and the theory of evolution Honderich writes of have all been deliberated on by Asian philosophers long ago. But ensconced in tenured and well-funded academic chairs often got through old boys' clubs' 'quid pro quos', no white philosopher need bother about Asian thinkers. If any Indian philosopher were to so much as speak of a bat in a philosophy paper,

or speak of the problem of other minds without mentioning Thomas Nagel and Edith Stein respectively, then that philosopher would be considered a plagiarist. Honderich's write-up on Burge shows how Honderich has either deliberately or through colonially provoked amnesia forgotten about Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, or Shinto ideas about the mind. The chastisement that 'ignorance is no excuse' apparently does not apply to first world thinkers. Now we return to Burge's exegesis of perception:

Where does mind begin? This seems like a natural question. Rocks and fires, floating in empty space, are overwhelmingly the dominant large citizens of the universe. Most of us are confident that rocks and fires do not have minds. We *humans* have minds. Do any other terrestrial beings have minds? If so, which ones? ...

Do other types of terrestrial animals have minds? If so, which ones? ...

Most of us think that apes and dolphins have minds. And cats and dogs. The cats seem willful. The dogs seem to want to be with us. Both have eyes that seem to express mindfulness. And we hear all the time about how smart apes and dolphins are. Willfulness, wanting, expressiveness, smarts [sic] all seem to be signs of mind. What about birds, with their bird brains? What of fish with their lifeless eyes? What of snakes with their robotic, mindless-seeming reflexes? (43).

Through humorous veridical ratiocination, Tyler Burge comes to this conclusion:

In any case, it is not a scientific requirement on perception that it be conscious. We know that bees and spiders have perception. We do not know whether they are conscious. Moreover, there is empirical reason to believe that some perception in bees, and in us, is unconscious.

Moreover, not all consciousness involves perception, or even representation. Awareness of the felt quality of pain (as distinguished from proprioceptive locating of pain) does not require representational content or perceptual constancies (56).

Tyler Burge is entirely right in his conclusions, but the question remains that these are foregone conclusions. Then how is Burge an original

thinker worth our attention? Even the Pre-Socratics in their own ways deliberated on whether ‘fires enjoy their dancing’ (44). So while Burge is a great iterative thinker, he is not all what Ted Honderich makes him out to be.

Noam Chomsky’s ‘Simple Truths, Hard Problems: Some Thoughts on Terror, Justice, and Self-Defence’ (273–92) is the usual rant from someone who is unwilling to settle outside the US, but is willing to comment on poor nations while doling out scholarships to those of his impoverished acolytes he considers are most Chomskian than Chomsky himself. In a moment of rare insight, Chomsky writes that he thought of calling his piece: ‘In Praise of Platitudes’ (274). In his linguistic theories elsewhere which Chomsky passes on as his own, without ever referring to the idea that each letter of the Sanskrit alphabet corresponds to a ‘matrika’ and thus language is existentially contingent, we have him at last having a break from his usual narcissistic harangues. At least, he realises he is banal.

This book reads like a penny dreadful. This with the caveat, most penny dreadfuls were better than this weird anthology.

Subhasis Chattopadhyay



Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: A Biography

Bernard McGinn

Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540. Website: <https://press.princeton.edu>. 2014. 272 pp. £24.95. HB. ISBN 9780691154268.

Bernard McGinn explains existence according to the *Summa Theologiae*:

The pure act of existence is not a concept, a property or an attribute. Rather, it is what we affirm when we make the judgment *that* God is. In this sense, questions 3 to 13 of the *Prima Pars* are an exercise in transcendental tautology in which we learn that our attempts to capture the absolute simpleness of God in human language simply cannot apply to God. Because there is no difference in God between his essence and his existence, or between his perfections and his nature,

all statements such as ‘God is good’ or ‘God is perfect’ can be reduced to the formula, ‘To be God is to be’. In Thomas’s view, the wisdom of *sacra doctrina* is not learning more of *what* can be said about God, but in coming to appreciate more and more fully the mystery of God’s unknowable existence by exploring how language falls short of knowing or naming God (84–5).

Bernard McGinn does an excellent job in writing the history of the *Summa* which

is a massive work, containing over a million and a half words divided into three large parts containing 512 topics (*quaestiones*) and no fewer than 2,668 articles (*articuli*) dealing with particular issues (some topics are given only two articles; the longest receives seventeen). In the translation of the English Dominicans published in the early decades of the past century the *Summa* takes up 2,565 double-column pages. Even more daunting is the vast literature that has been devoted to explaining the *Summa*. Although the work was contentious from the start, and its history has had ups and downs, the *Summa* has never lacked for readers and commentators (2).

Despite the book’s length and its complexities, it exerts an influence on the Christian mind only as much as the works of Acharya Shankara continues to do so on the Hindu mind. This is a fact that McGinn, who is an expert on the historiography of Christianity, does not mention in the book under review. Nonetheless, he summarises the effect of the *Summa* well: ‘The interest of Jewish philosophers in the thought of Thomas as a way to counter Averroistic readings of Aristotle that conflicted with the Hebrew Bible, something that had begun in the late thirteenth century with thinkers like Rabbi Hillel of Verona and Jehudah ben Daniel Romano, continued on during the fourteenth century’ (136).

McGinn, in his hurry to really summarise the *Summa*, forgets to write that the *Summa* is the bridge between St Augustine of Hippo’s works and the works of the postmodernists like Hannah Arendt and Jean Francois Lyotard. Without Thomas’s mediation, St Augustine would not have come to us. And neither Arendt, nor Lyotard would have worked on Augustine and