

Research Dossier

My work has so far focused on three main areas: (1) consciousness, self-awareness, and practical knowledge, (2) teleology and classification, (3) predication, universals, and aspects.

1. Consciousness, Self-Awareness, Practical Knowledge

In my PhD thesis I show that Descartes uses the term *conscientia*, which is commonly translated as “consciousness”, in its traditional meaning. I further show that this traditional meaning oscillates between (i) self-awareness and (ii) the awareness of right and wrong. I argue that the best way of capturing these two sides is to think of *conscientia* as a kind of practical knowledge. The PhD thesis has won the *Karl Alber Award* in 2005, and a paper summarizing its main results was published in the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* in 2007.

My current research connects to the main theme of my PhD thesis. I am investigating the notion of self-knowledge in Plato, in early medieval writers, and in contemporary analytic and continental philosophy (e.g. Gilbert Ryle, Michel Foucault, David Lewis, Richard Moran). I plan to further study conceptions of self-awareness in neo-Platonic and Arabic thought (mainly Ibn Sīnā, Al-Ghazālī), and Ibn Tufayl). This project has led to a couple of preliminary results. In one manuscript, for instance, I argue that there is a sense in which self-knowledge is a third kind of knowledge, separate from and on a par with theoretical and practical knowledge. In another manuscript, I argue that self-knowledge is the knowledge that rational beings have of the proper object of their rational capacities.

A related project that I am collecting ideas for has to do with the question left open at the end of the *Theaetetus*, about the kind of logos that is required for true belief to be knowledge. I suspect that this logos is ultimately a kind of understanding or know-how, and that Plato’s use of the phrase “*meta logou*” is his account of knowledge in important ways related to Aristotle’s conception of a capacity *meta logou* in *Metaphysics* Θ.

2. Teleology and Classification

In the years in between these two projects, I have worked on Aristotle’s *Physics* and Plato’s so-called “theory of forms”. In both cases, the result are innovative but also controversial. Here, of course, I can only state them without defending them properly. As for Aristotle, I argue that we may better

understand his division of four causes (material, formal, efficient, and final cause) by combining two distinctions: the distinction between (1) what something is and out of what something is, and the distinction between (2) things and processes. This has two important implications. First, the final cause of a process turns out to be the course that processes of this kind typically take. Second, the formal cause of a thing is not a feature or property that it possesses, but a standard with respect to which it may be assessed as a typical or atypical instance of its kind. This project was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in the years 2007-2010. I summarize its main results in a paper that was published in the *Journal of Philosophy* in 2009.

3. Predication, Universals, Aspects

In my work on Plato, I take up the idea that the formal cause of a thing is a paradigmatic instance of its kind. I argue that Plato's forms are not features, properties, or predicates, but rather paradigmatic instances or prototypes of a given kind of thing. In *The Man Without Properties* I argue that this is, in a sense, still true for Aristotle. In *Instance is the Converse of Aspect*, I draw consequences for a contemporary debate on instantiation and aspects. The latter paper has won the best paper of the year award of the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* in 2015. My work on this project was funded by the German Research Foundation in 2011-2013.

In the future, I plan to pursue this topic by establishing a unified account of phrases such as "insofar as" and "qua". These phrases are very important in philosophy, as they appear in crucial passages in Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and Leibniz, as well as in recent and contemporary debates (think of Castañeda's "guises" or Anscombe's "under a description"). Despite the importance of these devices, there seems to be no satisfactory account of how they work and what they mean.