

## EDITORIAL

Issue two begins with a broadside from the philosopher Alvin Plantinga against Richard Dawkins. In issue one Dawkins attacked the Alabama State Board of Education for requiring that all high school biology books feature a one-page insert explaining why the theory of evolution is merely a 'theory' – and a somewhat dubious theory at that. Dawkins saw the insert as a thinly-disguised creationist ruse to manipulate young minds. In this issue, Plantinga explains why he sees comparatively little wrong with Alabama placing the insert in school textbooks.

This issue also tackles another controversial topic: relativism about truth. It is popular, particularly in some humanities departments (especially in the US), to argue that that what is 'true' is always relative to a particular culture or perspective. For example, some argue that while, from our Western perspective, the claim that polygamy and female circumcision are morally wrong is true, from the perspective of other cultures it's false. Moral truth is ultimately *constructed*. There's no *absolute* truth on any issue, merely differing opinion. That's exactly why it's wrong of us to judge the practices of other cultures by our own Western standards.

Here you will find articles by Simon Blackburn, Robert Kirk and myself all challenging this sort of relativism about truth. For those new to the topic of relativism, my own article, 'Is it all relative?', might usefully be read as an introduction. Pieces defending relativism will feature in later issues.

There are also articles on a wide range of other philosophical issues. Anita Avramides' essay focuses on the philosophical problem of *other minds*. What reason have you to think that other humans aren't mindless zombies? Perhaps less than you think!

Also in this issue, Jonathan Wolff explains why Plato rejects democracy, Mary Midgley attacks Richard Dawkins for suggesting that human beings aren't quite real, Helen

Steward asks whether you have any control over how your life goes, and Alan Montefiore asks whether you could deliberately do what you knew to be wrong. In 'Miss B and Mrs Pretty', Piers Benn looks at two recent and tragic 'right to die' cases and asks whether they differ ethically. In 'Choosing at Random' there is advice from John Haigh on how best to play the National Lottery. Finally, Simon Critchley investigates humour. He also tells some very good jokes.

In issue three we'll be tackling the paranormal: exercise your mind with articles by leading philosophers and parapsychologists on the questions of whether 'psi' really exists, whether parapsychologists are guilty of practising 'voodoo science', and just how 'open-minded' we should be about ghosts, telepathy, ufos and weird stuff generally.

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