

GLADSTONE BOOKS

Website: www.gladstonebooks.co.uk

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Gladstone Books is so-named after William Gladstone, who became an MP for near-by Newark when only 23 years old in 1832, and was subsequently Liberal Prime Minister on four occasions until his death in 1898. But it is his *bibliophilia*, rather than his political achievements, that led to my adopting this name when I first started selling second-hand books in Newark in 2002. For Gladstone was an avid reader of the 30,000 books he eventually assembled in his personal library – which became the nucleus of the collection in St Deiniol’s library in north Wales, which is his most tangible legacy. I retained the name when moving my business to Lincoln in 2006, and now since May 2015, to my own shop in Southwell.

It's my intention to highlight specific areas of interest in successive issues. Last month, it was children's books: this month, by contrast, books on philosophy.

Ben Mephram

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- ❖ *You are receiving this issue of the Newsletter either because you are a registered subscriber or, in a few cases (when an email address was publicly-accessible), in anticipation of your interest*
 - ❖ *Anyone with an interest in books is welcome to receive this free Newsletter by registering on the website or contacting me personally. You can also unsubscribe via the website*
 - ❖ *Copies of all earlier issues of the Newsletter are freely available via the website*

Guest contributor

This issue features an article by another guest contributor - Christine Whitehouse (see item 5), who is Librarian of *The Historic Library* housed in the Minster. I am most grateful to Christine for her enlightening account of this treasury of old books, the significance of which I suspect many people in the town may be unaware.

2. CONFESSIONS OF A PHILOSOPHER by Bryan Magee *published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997*

Over the years, several people coming into my shop have asked if I can recommend *a good introduction to philosophy*- doubtless noticing the wide range of books on philosophy stocked. This seems to imply at least two things - first, that curiosity about this field of enquiry is quite common, and, second, that limitations in our educational system result in many conventionally educated people not knowing quite how to engage with philosophy. Yet, surely, we all have reflective moments in which we wonder *what we are, how consciousness can arise in material brains, if ethics is just a matter of custom; whether we have free will etc, etc.* That is, we all, at some level or other, *philosophise*.

But although it is deemed necessary for schools to instruct children on how to read, write, compute - and latterly, know certain facts about British history and memorise multiplication tables (at least, up to 12 times!), philosophy gets very short shrift. One reason for this may be that, as Socrates found, there is a fear that any teacher encouraging students to think for themselves, rather than learn by rote, might be accused of 'corrupting their young minds;' another reason, in consequence, may be that, with so few qualified tutors, philosophical thinking is ignored by default.

The charge of 'radicalisation' is now, justifiably, taken much more seriously than seemed necessary until quite recently, but it is important to stress that the aims of philosophy are the absolute opposite. For it is the essence of philosophical enquiry that students have to work out answers to problems for themselves; and although in higher education this entails reading and discussing ideas of major philosophers (such as Plato, Locke, Hume and Wittgenstein), the challenge is always to arrive at *one's own* defensible view. Doing philosophy usually demands quite hard concentration: but one of its worthy rewards lies in developing a sound resistance to gullibility.

So when asked to recommend a book I usually find myself in a dilemma, wondering whether *this* book is too challenging, or *that* too simplistic, or *another* too esoteric. And the answer will depend on a snap assessment - which might well be flawed. But one book I have recently re-read - Magee's *Confessions of a Philosopher* - deals with philosophy in such an accessible way that I am encouraged to recommend it strongly to people who might appreciate its biographical route to enlightenment.

Bryan Magee is a rare person in several respects. Born to working class parents in London's East End in 1930, he won an LCC scholarship to Christ's Hospital, the Bluecoat boarding school in Sussex, from where, after army service, he entered Oxford University to study history, and later politics and philosophy. At Oxford, where he was a friend, among others, of Robin Day and Michael Heseltine, he was President of the Oxford Union. But he was critical of the narrow interests (principally in *logical positivism* and *linguistic analysis*) of the Oxford school of philosophy at the time, and gained much of his deeper interest in philosophy from a postgraduate year at Yale University in the USA.

Returning to England in 1958, it was his ambition to become a Labour MP, but it was only after several attempts that he achieved this in 1974 when elected MP for Leyton, a seat he held for almost 10 years. But in the intervening period he established himself as a prominent presenter of current affairs programmes on ITV, and made several documentaries on issues such as prostitution, sexually transmitted diseases, abortion and homosexuality (which was illegal in Britain at the time). His passion for Wagner's music led to his writing two books on the composer, and in 1977 his novel *Facing Death* was published (for which, remarkably, the working title had been 'Love Story').

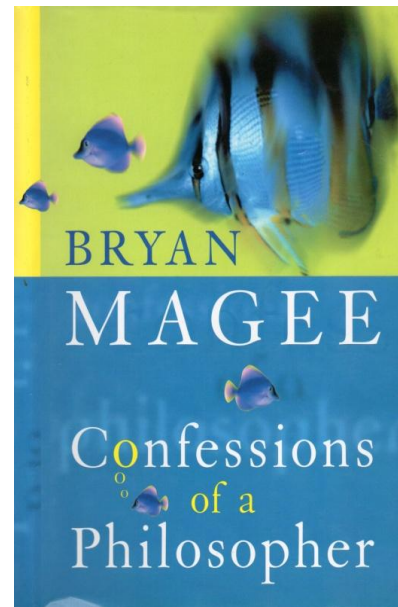
Even so, politics and music aside, philosophy had always been a major preoccupation, so that he leapt at the chance of presenting a series of BBC radio programmes in the early 1970s entitled *Modern British Philosophy*, in which he interviewed a number of prominent philosophers. In preparation for the programmes he got to know, on personal terms, the two, arguably, leading philosophers of that time, Bertrand Russell and Karl Popper - visiting their homes and engaging in philosophical debate with them. The success of that series led in 1978 to an invitation to present a series of BBC TV interviews with leading philosophers from across the world, called *Men of Ideas*, and subsequently, in 1987, another TV series, *The Great Philosophers*. The transcripts of these programmes later appeared as books, which, despite the suspicion that they were of the *coffee table* variety, may be considered ideal for introducing philosophy to many who would otherwise consider it beyond their ken.

Magee's skill was in making philosophical ideas accessible to educated people with enquiring minds, who, because of the priorities of standard education, were unaware of the ways in which throughout history people had addressed those thorny questions raised in my first paragraph. His *Confessions of a Philosopher* is essentially an introduction to philosophy written from a biographical perspective - a form with the great virtue of revealing his own quandaries and how, as he encountered new ideas, some problems were clarified while others become more complicated. His achievement in popularising philosophy was not welcomed by everyone: e.g. some leading philosophers were peeved that an *amateur* should receive such effusive acclaim.

But that Magee is clearly much more than a populariser of philosophy is implicit in the comments of some professional reviewers of his book *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* (Oxford, 1997). For example, one reviewer claimed that: *Magee's book is to be welcomed as the most illuminating and admirable study of Schopenhauer's philosophy yet to appear in English*; while another stated that *He sets about the task of explaining Schopenhauer's ideas with a commitment and enthusiasm all too rare in philosophical writing, and succeeds admirably in communicating his excitement to the reader*. Indeed, I have found his account of the philosophy of Schopenhauer (whose writings I have turned to quite late in life) to be especially illuminating.

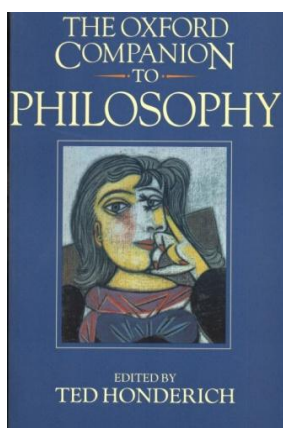
So, despite not occupying a permanent academic position in philosophy, Magee's wide acquaintance with its subject matter and its leading exponents, coupled with a sensitive appreciation of what non-philosophers often find particularly problematical, has made him an engaging guide in this largely unexplored intellectual territory. And, leaving aside his particular insights into Schopenhauer's philosophy, the consistent lucidity of his writing in *Confessions of a Philosopher* will surely be appreciated by many people whose perplexity over the nature of philosophical enquiry is not always eased by the numerous introductions to the subject that are now available - some of which are listed below, in item 3, under *popular philosophy*.

Footnote My own involvement in the field of applied philosophy perhaps needs some explanation. Although a keen 'student of philosophy' since a teenager, I studied physiology at university and then pursued research in biochemistry for 30 years. But, at Nottingham University in 1993, my philosophical interests became recognised when I established the *Centre for Applied Bioethics*, a teaching and research programme, which still thrives since my retirement 10 years ago. I have been Executive Director of the *Food Ethics Council*, served on various EU and national bioethics committees; and Oxford University Press, who publish my book *Bioethics* (item 3), now also fund the annual *Ben Mepham Bioethics Oration Prize*.



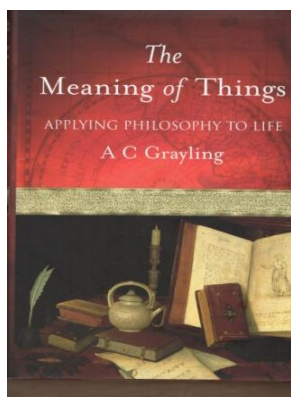
3. A small selection of books on philosophy in stock at Gladstone Books

Well over 200 titles are on display in the shop (and *many* more are in store). This selection aims to illustrate the range of books, in terms of subjects, age and price. In no sense have they been chosen as *the best* or most *important* books in stock, but rather to illustrate the scope of philosophical enquiry and typical prices. To provide a reasonable selection (25 titles are shown), brief descriptions only are given, i.e. (Publication date of the copy) [Publisher, (editor/s), page number, hardback (hb) or paperback (pb), and my assessment of the book's condition as *good* (g) or *very good* (vg)].



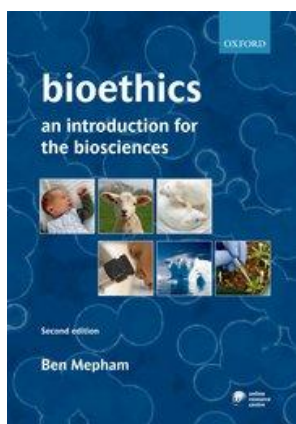
Classical works

- Plato:** *The Republic* (1866) [Cambridge, ed. Davies & Vaughan. 370 pp. hb. g] £10.00
- Erasmus:** *In Praise of Folly* (1974) [Folio, ed. Radice. 10 illus. 116 pp. hb (boxed). vg] £8.50
- Descartes:** *Moral Philosophy and Psychology* (1973) [Harvester, ed. J Blom. 288 pp. hb. g] £6.00
- Kant:** *Critique of Pure Reason* (1970) [Macmillan, tr. N K Smith. 682 pp. pb. g] £5.50
- Hume:** *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1978) [Oxford, ed. Nidditch 740 pp. pb. g] £5.50



Examples of significant recent philosophy

- Isaiah Berlin:** *The Sense of Reality* (1996) [Chatto & Windus 278 pp. hb. g] £8.50
- Mary Midgley:** *Wisdom, Information and Wonder* (1991) [Routledge 276 pp. pb. vg] £10.00
- K R Popper & J C Eccles:** *The Self and its Brain* (1977) [Routledge, Kegan Paul. 598 pp. pb. vg] £8.50
- Alasdair MacIntyre:** *After Virtue* (1997) [Duckworth 286 pp. pb. g] £8.00



Popular philosophy

- Alain de Botton:** *The Consolations of Philosophy* (2000) [Penguin 265 pp. pb. g] £4.50
- Julian Baggini:** *The Pig that wants to be Eaten* (2005) [Granta 306 pp. hb. vg] £6.50
- A C Grayling:** *The Meaning of Things* (2001) [Weidenfeld & Nicolson 208 pp. hb. vg] £6.00
- C E M Joad:** *Teach Yourself Philosophy* (1968) [English Universities Press 224 pp. hb. vg] £5.00

Applied Ethics

- Peter Singer:** *Practical Ethics* (1999) [Cambridge. 396pp. pb.vg] £6.50
- Ben Mepham** *Bioethics* (2008) [Oxford 440 pp. pb. vg. 2nd edition. See website for reviews]
This is offered *new* at £30.00 (i.e. 15% discount!)
- Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen(eds):** *The Quality of Life* (1998) [Clarendon, 454 pp. pb.vg] £10.00

Philosophy of Science

Karl Popper: *Conjectures and Refutations* (1972) [Routledge 432 pp. pb. vg] £8.00

T S Kuhn: *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970) [Chicago UP. 210 pp. pb. g] £8.00

Ben Goldacre: *Bad science* (2008) [Fourth Estate. 338 pp. pb. vg] £5.50

Theology

Mark Vernon: *The Big Questions: God* (2012) [Quercus 208 pp. hb. vg] £6.50

Rowan Williams: *Tokens of Trust: Christian Belief* (2007) [Canterbury 160 pp. hb. vg] £6.00

Karen Armstrong *A History of God* (1999) [Vintage 543 pp. pb. vg] £5.00

Anthony Kenny: *Reason and Religion* (2003) [Blackwell 182 pp. hb. g] £6.00

Reference books

Ted Honderich (ed): *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (1995) [Oxford 1010 pp. pb. g] £8.50

Kevin Burns: *Eastern Philosophy* (2007) [Capella 208 pp. pb. g] £6.00

Footnote

Perhaps it is worthwhile reproducing here a sentence from my article (item 2) in the first issue of this Newsletter, which explained the philosophy behind the setting up of Gladstone Books, namely:

On principle, I aim to include books written from different perspectives, e.g. from left to right in political terms, from fundamentalist to atheistic ends of the theological spectrum, and from the classical to avante garde in fictional literature and the arts.

4. A modest request

Many people visiting Gladstone Books have made complimentary remarks about the range of books in stock, their quality - and even the peaceful atmosphere - all of which it is naturally gratifying to hear. But the 'footfall' in Bull Yard, hardly a thoroughfare to anywhere else, remains quite low.

So efforts to ensure the survival of this enterprise, as for virtually all independent second-hand book dealers (at a considerable disadvantage compared with registered charities, who e.g. receive all their stock as donations and assistance from volunteers), might be helped by disseminating good publicity as widely as possible.

One way that willing customers could help is by posting a comment (like those mentioned above, that are often expressed to me in person) on the **Book Guide** website (managed by INPRINT, an independent national organisation based in Stroud, Gloucestershire - who invite booksellers to **encourage visitors to review your bookshop on our site, to tempt others to visit**). The way to do this is:

- Access the Gladstone Books website i.e. www.gladstonebooks.co.uk
- Then click the [Book Guide website](#)
- Then click **Add a comment** and fill in details requested.
- All the comments can be viewed by clicking **Read comments**

Of course, in making this request I may also be laying myself open to *unwelcome* comments. But I'll take the risk!

Ben Mepham

5. TREASURES TO BE DISCOVERED AT SOUTHWELL MINSTER

Where, in the centre of Southwell, can you find the following amazing books, waiting for you to admire in an ancient room at the top of a flight of stairs?

- a manuscript Bible from the 14th century, with ornamental initials
- fascinating atlases from the 16th century
- a 1550 edition of *Chaucer's* works
- Walter Raleigh's *History of the World*
- a first edition of *Doctor Johnson's dictionary*
- Newton's *Principia Mathematica*, printed during his lifetime
- a complete set of the *Bridgewater Treatises*

The Historic Chapter Library of Southwell Minster contains all of these volumes in a collection which includes not only Bibles, sermons, writings of the Church Fathers and theologians, as might be expected, but also history, geography, law, science, classics, music, literature and local history.

The library holds books dating from the 14th century onwards, but the present collection was not begun until about 1690. Unfortunately, any books which Southwell Minster had owned in mediaeval times had been lost by the 17th century. At the end of that century, Chapter, the governing body, decided to create a new library. Donations from local gentlemen formed the core of this new library, Edward Lee of Norwell contributing especially fine volumes. The collection was augmented over the years by gifts from canons, vicars and others. The library was housed in various places in the Minster until the 19th century when it was moved into the old treasury, where it remains now. (Entry is via the door immediately to the west of the chapter house passage)

The earliest printed book in the library is a rare volume of *Aristotle's* works printed in 1502. Further examples of early printing include the *Decretals of Pope Gregory VII* (1519) in its original oak boards, and the great *Polyglot Bible of 1657*, a masterpiece of the printer's craft.

Because the library displays the very varied interests of the clergy of the eighteenth century it is now possible to find books to suit many people's literary interests. For the scientist, there are the *Transactions of the Royal Society* for the years 1780-1808. For the student of literature, there is a first folio edition of *Beaumont and Fletcher plays*. If you would like to try to read Norman French you might look at the 1543 book of *Law Reports of Henry VII and Henry VIII*, sections of which are unknown elsewhere.

Biblical scholars can examine a first edition of the *King James Bible*, and theologians read the sermons of Edwin Sandys (Archbishop of York during the reign of Elizabeth I), Christopher Wordsworth (Bishop of Lincoln and nephew of the poet William Wordsworth) and many others. An architect might open *Vitruvius's De Architectura* of 1586. And if you like to look at pictures, a lavishly illustrated 1517 edition of the *works of Vergil* will delight you as also will a colourful hand-illustrated manuscript of the *Articles of Religion* made by the Vicar of Calverton in the 19th century.

Musicians can enjoy *Arnold's edition of Handel's works*. Poetry lovers can read not only *Milton*, but also Provost Hugh Heywood's verses 'On a Golden Thread'. For local historians, the works of Thoroton, Dimock, Dickinson, Shilton and more recent descriptions are available.

Searching the Library Catalogue

The library catalogue can be searched on-line via the Minster's website. If you go to 'historic library, a 'search library' button will open, which will enable you to search from a drop-down menu of archives/books/plans/manuscripts/choir music. However, most of the archives are now kept at Nottinghamshire Archives, in more suitable environmental conditions.

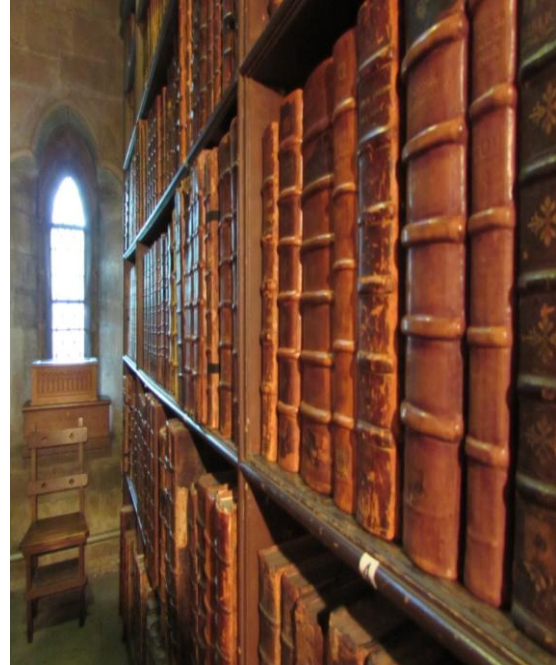
Book displays in the Minster

- A selection of books from the library, which is changed each month, is on display in the Chapter House passage
- The library is usually open on bank holidays for the public to see a small themed exhibition of books of interest.

Visiting the Library

The Historic Library is open by appointment. If you would like to visit, you are very welcome to make arrangements in either of the following two ways:

- telephone the librarian, Christine Whitehouse on 0115 966 3469
- email: library@southwellminster.org.uk



How the *Just So Stories* got their name

These began as bedtime stories read by Rudyard Kipling to his daughter *Effie* (Josephine), which were intended to put her to sleep, and were not to be interrupted by a single word: hence *just so*. So the stories became like charms, but they acquired a particularly emotional significance for Kipling, because soon after the first three were written, when on a sea voyage to New York in the winter of 1898-99, both father and daughter fell ill with pneumonia, from which the six year old Effie died.

With titles like *How the camel got his hump* and *How the whale got his throat*, the stories aimed to answer the questions young children often ask, in ways that satisfy their taste for primitive and poetic justice. Kipling added more, so that when first published in 1902 there were 12 *Just So* stories.

Source: Oxford University Press website

6. BOOK FAIR and Sunday opening

The next Nottinghamshire book fair will be held from 10.00 until 16.00 on Sunday 6th March, 2016 at the Village Hall, Farndon, near Newark, Nottinghamshire NG24 3SZ. Admission: £1.00

Gladstone Books in Southwell (7 miles west of Newark) will be open from 14.30 - 16.30 on that day, for the convenience of those travelling to the area from some distance away.