

Stellenbosch Socratic Journal

Volume 4, November 2024

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Ivan Bock

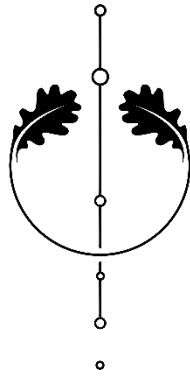
Reid Donson

Hanrié Viljoen

Robin Bruce

Jacqueline Tulleners





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Contents

Editorial board	iv
Foreword	v
<i>Tamlyn February</i>	
To jettison the mind: consciousness, conceivability, and the mind–body problem	1
<i>Reid Donson</i>	
On slow reading and slow violence: slow reading to recognise and address violence done to nature	14
<i>Robin Bruce</i>	
A labour rights-based critique of Nozick’s entitlement theory	23
<i>Sasha Söderlund</i>	
What’s desert got to do with it? Pragmatic theories of responsibility and why we can discard our modern notion of free will	33
<i>Ivan Bock</i>	
In the shadow of performance and repression: the micromanaged child	47
<i>Alissa Welman</i>	
Restricted freedoms of menstruating women: a capability approach to period poverty	53
<i>Hanrié Viljoen</i>	
Death: a mortal answer	62
<i>Thomas Russell</i>	

Editorial board

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Co-Editors

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Reid Donson

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Jacqueline Tulleners

Cover and original layout designer

Paul Joubert

Foreword

Tamlyn February

I am deeply honoured to have the opportunity to write this foreword. This is the fourth volume of the Stellenbosch Socratic Journal (SSJ), and the fourth year of its existence. The SSJ has grown tremendously since its inception, and this year, we received a record number of undergraduate and postgraduate submissions. This volume boasts a wide variety of papers ranging from philosophy of mind, critical theory, political philosophy, moral philosophy, and even reflections on why it is rational to fear death (in true philosophical fashion). The variety of papers reflect the philosophical interests, insights, and abilities of the brilliant students at Stellenbosch University's Philosophy Department.

This volume opens on a radical note with “To jettison the mind: consciousness, conceivability, and the mind–body problem” that tackles the age-old philosophical mind–body problem that originates in Cartesian dualism. **Reid Donson** argues that the issue lies not in the capacity of philosophers and scientists to solve the problem but lies with the ‘problem’ itself. Rather, Donson argues that the mind–body problem is a false problem because we do not understand what we mean by ‘mind’ in the first place. For this reason, we ought to jettison the concept of the mind entirely and embrace a kind of physicalism with a narrower conception of consciousness, which excludes the mind.

The next paper, “On slow reading and slow violence: slow reading to recognise and address violence done to nature”, challenges us to engage with slow philosophy. **Robin Bruce** explores the detrimental effects of instrumental reasoning about nature and how we can overcome this. Unlike spectacular or explosive violence, the slow violence that is being done to nature is more difficult to recognise and address due to its effects being spatially and temporally removed from its cause. Bruce argues and demonstrates that slow reading has three aspects that can help us address and recognise slow violence done to nature: openness, understanding, and embodiment.

Turning to political philosophy, “A labour rights-based critique of Nozick’s entitlement theory” provides a critique of Robert Nozick’s libertarian theory of justice as entitlement through the lens of labour rights. **Sasha Söderlund** explains that Nozick’s theory of justice applied to the labour context means that labour agreements that are free from direct coercion are just, and ought to be unregulated to protect individual autonomy and liberty. However, Söderlund argues that Nozick’s emphasis on consent fails to account for the unjust exploitation that arises in an economy of inequality and desperation, such as in the case of exploitative mica mining in India.

The fourth paper in this volume tackles yet another age-old philosophical problem. In “What’s desert got to do with it? Pragmatic theories of responsibility and why we can discard our modern notion of free will”, **Ivan Bock** severs the oft-thought link between classic free will or basic desert, and moral responsibility. Bock argues for a minimalist pragmatist freedom that proves to be more fruitful than the classic free will debates. This pragmatist understanding of free will allows us to have attributability, answerability, and accountability responsibility, which can be practically understood and grounded in both backwards-looking and forward-looking responsibility practices.

The next paper, “In the shadow of performance and repression: the micromanaged child”, applies Herbert Marcuse’s Freudian neo-Marxist critique of capitalist society to the phenomenon of ‘helicopter parents’ or overparenting. **Alissa Welman** explores how the parent-child relationship reproduces what Marcuse terms the ‘surplus repression’ and the ‘performance principle’ of capitalist society. Inspired by Marcuse’s notion of surplus repression, Welman argues that parents are engaging in ‘surplus-parenting’ when they micromanage their children, which demonstrates how the parent-child relationship is inextricably tied to social conditions of oppression.

The penultimate paper in this volume, “Restricted freedoms of menstruating women: a capability approach to period poverty” takes us back to political philosophy. **Hanrié Viljoen** addresses the pressing global issue of period poverty, as the lack of access to, or inability to acquire, access, and perform menstrual health products, facilities, and practices. Drawing upon Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum’s Capability Approach, Viljoen argues that period poverty is a severe barrier to the achievement of capabilities for menstruating women and girls. It bars them from attaining the capabilities of being educated, being healthy, and being socially integrated. Women and girls across the world can only be truly free if period poverty is eradicated.

This volume of the SSJ concludes with **Thomas Russell’s** philosophical meditation on death, titled “Death: a mortal answer”. Russell challenges the Roman philosopher-poet, Lucretius’ argument, who claims that it is irrational to fear death because the nature of death is the same abyss of nothingness that precedes your birth. In contrast to the cessation of being and possibility that is death, being alive has the essence of possibility structurally built into it. Russell argues, in contrast to Lucretius, that it is the very loss of the possibility of having possibilities that humans fear and are rational to fear.

On a final note, I would like to express immense gratitude to all the contributors to this volume. This includes the authors, co-editors, designer, reviewers, the Socratic Society’s departmental advisor, Dr Andrea Palk, and our departmental administrator, Ms Rachel Adams.

Happy reading!