

Editor's Introduction

This issue of the *Philosophical Pathways* journal starts with papers which are concerned with the metaphysical commitments of political philosophies, before moving to a paper which concerns a non-political metaphysical question. There is an objection that some readers might have to this description, which I shall mention later. First I shall say something about each individual paper.

The first paper in this month's issue is by Fainos Mangena, entitled "Africana Notions of Gender, Rape and Objectification." In this article Mangena summarizes Lindsay Kelland's understanding of the kind of harm involved in rape. Kelland claims that women at present, despite being autonomous agents, live in a world where they are cast by men as objects, objects to male subjects. Mangena puts Kelland's claims in dialogue with the perspective of Africana Womanist philosophy. Mangena argues that this philosophy would challenge Kelland's claim because in African cultures women are regarded as subjects. Africana Womanist philosophy is centred on the idea of the family and within the African family women are thought of as active subjects, rather than passive objects. Furthermore, in some circumstances a woman is expected to play the role of father as well as mother. Yet Mangena nevertheless thinks that Kelland's points remain relevant and that writings belonging to Africana Womanist philosophy fail to deal adequately with women as victims of rape.

I am the author of the second paper in this month's issue, entitled "Non-social human beings in the original position." Critics of liberal political philosophy have often charged liberal philosophers with failing to grasp that human beings are social beings. It is nothing unusual to hear characterizations of liberal philosophy as having an atomistic view of the self or as seeing the individual as prior to social relationships. To many liberal philosophers, these

characterizations will seem vague and metaphorical. A more precise statement of what they are allegedly committed to needs to be offered.

In my paper, I argue that there is a sense in which John Rawls, one of the most influential liberal philosophers of the twentieth century, can be said to be committed to non-social human beings. A non-social human being, in this context, means a human being who does not value communication or interaction as essential to a good life for them, who is not suffering from an extreme psychological disorder and who is not mistaken about what kind of life they can enjoy. Strictly speaking, Rawls does not have to say that such people are possible. But to defend his system he must say that it is plausible enough that there could be such people, plausible enough that we should avoid bias against them, as well as against other human beings, when deciding on rules for society.

The third paper in this issue is “Can there be a Foundationalist or Coherentist Account of Predication?” by Marlon de Vera. The paper responds to a regress that arises in part from the following proposition: if several things fall under a common description, there must be some feature or set of features which means that the description correctly applies to these things. So, to take an example from the paper, if several things fall under the description “white things,” there must be a feature or set of features which means that the description correctly applies to these things. Suppose that they all share the common feature of being disposed to give human beings an experience of being white in standard lighting conditions. Then another description that correctly applies to these things is “being disposed to give human beings an experience of being white in standard lighting conditions.” And so, given our initial proposition, there must be some feature or set of features which means that this other description correctly applies to these things. But assuming that for any feature there can be some statement which identifies it, the process repeats itself infinitely.

De Vera introduces the thought that a debate in a different area of philosophy, namely what justifies our beliefs, is helpful for stopping this infinite regress. If you start with a belief and you consider what justifies it, and then you present another belief, the question arises as to what justifies this other belief. Two well-known solutions have been put forward to prevent this question from always recurring. According to foundationalism, there are beliefs which need no further justification. Such beliefs can serve as a foundation, on which a structure of other beliefs can be built. According to coherentism, if the system of beliefs as a whole is coherent, then the beliefs within that system count as justified. De Vera considers whether analogous solutions can be applied to stop the regress of appropriate descriptions and the features that make them appropriate.

Earlier I said that this issue starts with papers concerned with the metaphysical commitments of political philosophies: the fact that African systems of thought do not represent the essence of woman as passive and the significance of this fact; the question of whether Rawls's political philosophy is committed to the possibility of non-social human beings. The issue then moves to non-political metaphysics, or so it may seem: a regress involving features and descriptions of them. But I wonder whether someone will protest that even such a regress has a connection to politics. Some schools of thought deny that there are non-political parts of philosophy. Strands of postmodernism and Marxism deny this. It would be interesting to explore what connection there is between the third paper and politics, if any, but doing so is beyond the scope of this introduction.