

the review of  
**metaphysics**

a philosophical quarterly

---

Review

Author(s): Graham Priest

Review by: Graham Priest

Source: *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (Sep., 2007), pp. 120-122

Published by: Philosophy Education Society Inc.

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20130895>

Accessed: 24-05-2015 02:15 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Philosophy Education Society Inc. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Review of Metaphysics*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

percent of that of their neighbors in Europe. The magnetic appeal is obvious as many risk their lives to make the crossing from North Africa and beyond to seek a better life in Europe. Many who seek to immigrate come not only from Africa but from the Middle East, and most are Muslims who share a way of life that is increasingly difficult to integrate within Western culture. Alesina and Giavazzi do not deny the need for immigration, given a European birth rate below replacement levels, but they advocate selective immigration in the interest of social cohesion.

The authors are particularly severe when they compare working hours put in by Europeans with those of their American counterparts. They also see a wide gap when it comes to technology research and give the United States the edge in high tech firms, including aircraft, pharmaceuticals, computers, TCL equipment, and medical and optical instruments. They speak to the brain drain as Europe exports many of its brightest students to the United States and colorfully point out that “the brightest students from India and from Central Europe fly over Paris on their way to Boston, Chicago, and California.”

Attractively written, the book is the result of serious research undertaken by the authors over many years. Alberto Alesina is the Ropes Professor of Political Economics at Harvard University; Francesco Giavazzi is Professor of Economics at Bacconi University. Although they write as economists, they are not oblivious to the political cleavage between European citizens and their leaders. The multiculturalism favored by the ruling elites, given the propensity of Brussels to edge into more and more areas that affect daily life, has driven home the perception that something has gone awry in Europe. The former prime minister of Spain, Jose Maria Aznar, whom the authors quote, may have it right when he said the Europeans should rediscover their “Christian roots and cultural values, and set aside the enormous error of multiculturalism, a failed experiment.”—Jude P. Dougherty, *The Catholic University of America*.

BOGHOSSIAN, Paul. *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006. x + 139 pp. Cloth, \$24.95—Boghossian's book concerns a view that he dubs *Equal Validity*: “There are many radically different, yet ‘equally valid’ ways of knowing the world, with science being just one of them” (p. 2). The view is an old one in Western Philosophy, to be found in various Presocratics. However, it has gained a strong presence, almost an orthodoxy, in contemporary thought as a result of the “postmodernism” so influential in university humanities departments, if not more generally. Boghossian is against it.

After a brief introduction in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 presents the view the book favors. This has three aspects:

1. There are many facts which are objective, in the sense that they obtain independently of the any cognitive agents.

2. Various beliefs about these facts can be objectively (though not necessarily infallibly) justified by appropriate evidence.
3. Under appropriate conditions, exposure to the evidence alone can explain why we believe some of these things.

A denial of each of these provides a variant of Equal Validity.

Chapters 2 and 3 spell out the antithesis of 1—that all facts are, in some sense, socially constructed—and defend 1. Chapters 4, 5, and 6, spell out the antithesis of 2—that all justification is relative to a social or historical context—and defend 2. The very brief Chapter 8 spells out the antithesis of 3—a version of the Strong Programme in the Sociology of Knowledge—and defends 3. In each case, the arguments *pro* and *contra* are spelled out and weighed; and each case, Equal Validity comes up lacking. The book is short, snappy, and clearly written. (Clearly, Boghossian wanted to make his book accessible not just to professional philosophers.)

Another of the book's great virtues is that it actually spells out the arguments for the various versions of Equal Validity. It is not uncommon, unfortunately, to find these views held in an intellectually shoddy way. Boghossian mounts the arguments for the views better than their defenders often do. An irony of this is that the views often come out looking better than one might have thought. Indeed, at the end of reading the book I had more sympathy for some of the ideas than I had at the start! Some of Boghossian's arguments against the opposition seem dead right; but by others, I'm afraid I wasn't persuaded.

For example: in Chapter 3, one argument Boghossian uses against the idea that all facts are socially constructed is simply to point out that, if this is the case, the "Law of Non-Contradiction" may be violated, since it is possible to construct the facts that  $p$  and  $\sim p$  (p. 40). This is not to take the opposition seriously. The constructivist holds that the facts of logic are constructed just as much as any other facts. There is nothing to stop such a person constructing a logic in which the Law of Non-Contradiction fails.

In the next chapter, Boghossian considers Rorty's version of constructivism, which avoids this problem. All claims must be made relative to the appropriate background theory, or frame of reference. In particular (p. 52), an utterance of:

4.  $p$

must be construed as expressing the claim that:

5. According to a theory,  $T$ , which we accept,  $p$ .

It is clear that according to such a view, the contents  $p$  and  $\sim p$  are no longer contradictory. Boghossian now objects to this version of the view. One argument he uses is a regress argument (of which many kinds feature in the book). Thus, an utterance of 5 must itself be understood as:

6. According to a theory,  $T^1$ , which we accept, according to a theory,  $T$ , which we accept,  $p$ .

Similar considerations apply to 6; and so on. The regress is vicious: "It is absurd to propose that . . . what we must mean by [sentences such as  $p$ ] are infinitary propositions that we could neither express nor understand" (p. 56).

Now this is too fast. One does not have to suppose that the meaning of 4 is given by 5. Rather, 4 says exactly what it means, but the meaning presupposes a certain frame of reference provided by  $T$ . Similarly, if an observer,  $O$ , says that an object is traveling at  $x$  km/hr, this is true or false relative to  $O$ 's inertial frame,  $F$ . But the utterance does not mean that the object is traveling at  $x$  km/hr with respect to  $F$ . Inertial frames may be no part of  $O$ 's conceptual apparatus at all. And  $F$  may it be traveling at a speed of  $y$  km/hr with respect to frame  $F^1$ , etc. None of this is vicious.

There is much more, of course, to be said about these arguments, and about all the other arguments that the book employs. This is a great book for a seminar or discussion group, and it's about time that someone wrote it. Happily, it was someone with Boghossian's clarity, verve, and panache.—Graham Priest, *Universities of Melbourne and St. Andrews*.

BROWN, Deborah J. *Descartes and the Passionate Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. xi + 13 pp. Cloth, \$85.00—Recently, Descartes' *Passions of the Soul* has enjoyed increased interest among scholars, bringing renewed attention to the Cartesian doctrine of mind or soul. *Descartes and the Passionate Mind* attempts to emphasize the importance of this last of Descartes' writings with respect to that doctrine. Brown holds that the prevalent notion of mind as a mere disembodied consciousness is at best partial and at worst misleading. To her, Descartes' doctrine includes the functioning of mind and body together. Mind-body unity is addressed briefly but significantly in Part 6 of the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, and scholars have recognized that the themes of this part connect with themes in the *Passions of the Soul*. Brown elaborates some of those themes and tries to show that the Cartesian mind is "passionate"; indeed it must be if we are to act in the practical realm. On crucial points, however, she asserts more than she demonstrates.

Chapters One and Two lay out the terrain of her study. Chapter One asserts that the *Passions* is a unified work. Its theme—the "functional integration of mind and body" (p. 17)—and even its structure owe much, she believes, to Descartes' correspondence with Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia. The *Passions* "illuminates the need to combine mechanistic, medical and moral considerations" (p. 23). She compares it to the *Meditations*: each is a "kind of training manual" that leads one to something central about the soul, to the *res cogitans* in the *Meditations*, and to a