

Foreword

Trivialism is the view that everything is true; in this book, Paul Kabay mounts a defence of the view. The book is a revised version of Paul's PhD thesis at the University of Melbourne, of which I was the supervisor. When Paul approached me to ask if I would supervise his PhD on this, it seemed to me that the view was so outrageous that the project had no chance of success. Still, I have a certain sympathy with people who wish to push the envelope of philosophy. So, though I told him what I thought, I agreed. It was the right decision. Paul was determined to succeed, and succeed he did. He mounted a defence of the view of a kind I had just not believed to be possible.

Many people will be tempted to reject Paul's view out of hand. After all, life is relatively short, and one can consider only so many things. This would be a short-sighted mistake. Reflect for a moment on skepticism. The skeptic is a person who will agree to nothing about how things are. Ancient skeptics notwithstanding, the view is literally incredible. But one does not have to believe a view to engage with it profitably. For over two thousand years, in fact, skepticism has driven some of the most important thinking about epistemology. The process has been enormously significant in deepening our understanding of some of our most fundamental concepts. Now the trivialist is, in some sense, the dual of the skeptic: whilst the skeptic will accede to nothing, the trivialist will accede to everything. Both views are so extreme that it is not initially clear even how to engage rationally with either of them. Yet it is precisely this kind of situation which forces us to dig hard, uncovering the things most deeply hidden.

Nor is the challenge of trivialism simply a rerun of the challenge of skepticism. Some issues, it is true, are similar: both seriously problematise the rationality of debate, for example. But skepticism is an epistemological matter; trivialism is an alethic (ontological) one. Engaging with skepticism, we are engaging with the concepts of knowledge, belief, justification; engaging with trivialism, we are engaging with the concepts of truth, reality, meaning. Debates around trivialism can therefore be expected to produce the same sort of developments as skepticism, but with a different raft of

concepts.

Trivialism is not a new view. It was endorsed by some of the Presocratics—certainly according to Aristotle, who took the view in his sights in *Metaphysics*, Book 4. There has been little serious interest in the topic since then. Paul has succeeded in putting the view back on the philosophical table, in full recognition of Aristotle's arguments. Doing so is, it seems to me, an achievement of no small magnitude. We may be irked that one of our greatest certitudes can no longer be endorsed thoughtlessly; but even if one does not agree with Paul's view, one should all be enormously grateful to him. It is irritation, after all, which produces pearls.

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