

**Peter Catapano and Simon Critchley (eds), *The Stone Reader: Modern Philosophy in 133 Arguments*, WW Norton & Company, New York, 2016; pp: 816; RRP US\$39.95 Hardcover.**

In the last few years, the discipline of philosophy has been subject to a variety of criticisms. Some say that it does not make progress; others that it is an indulgent practice; and some say that it has not kept up with the sciences. One eminent scientist, Stephen Hawking, in his recent book *The Grand Design*, has gone as far as to say that philosophy is dead. It is, therefore, timely that editors Peter Catapano and Simon Critchley have assembled a quality collection of essays which showcase the relevance and importance of philosophy to our current age.

*The Stone Reader: Modern Philosophy in 133 Arguments* is, as its title suggests, a collection of 133 different essays, which were originally published in *The Stone*, an online Opinion report of *The New York Times*, which has been running since 2010. The essays themselves are written by 'contemporary philosophers and thinkers on issues both timely and timeless' (p. xv). While most of the authors contribute just one article, there are a few authors who contribute multiple essays—with each essay being about four to five pages in length. The essays themselves are organized into four sections: Philosophy; Science; Religion and Morals; and Society. Each section divides into further subsections. In what follows, I will give a *very* brief account of each of these four sections, as well as mention some personal highlights.

The book's first section is titled 'Philosophy'. It deals with issues concerning philosophy's use, its strengths, and its weaknesses. Given that philosophy has always been a self-reflective endeavour, it is fitting that some recent controversies within the discipline are addressed here. Sally Haslanger's essay 'Women in Philosophy? Do the Math', for example, raises some startling facts about the lack of women in the profession. She cites a 2003 American study which states that the percentage of woman in full-time instructional postsecondary positions was a mere 16.6 percent of the total thirteen thousand employed. The numbers are even worse for women of colour, which were zero. Haslanger says that 'change needs to happen on multiple fronts for us to make progress' (p. 36). Another striking essay in this section is Justin E. H. Smith's 'Philosophy's Western Basis.' Here Smith speaks of the 'tremendous failure' (p. 95) of our own society to extend the philosophical curriculum to non-Western traditions. He suggests that we have neglected the richness of other philosophical traditions such as the ones found in India and China.

The second section is titled 'Science.' Its essays address the question of whether science can explain everything in the world. It opens with an exchange between Timothy Williamson and Alex Rosenberg about naturalism: the view that (i) only the natural world exists, and (ii) the best way to find out about it is by using the scientific method. Williamson begins by arguing that naturalism is a dogma—suggesting that mathematics, for example, cannot easily be explained by the scientific method. Rosenberg provides a rebuttal to this claim in the second essay, to which Williamson

responds to him in the third. This exchange nicely sets the stage for the essays to come, that feature issues concerning whether science can explain consciousness, and whether or not neuroscience has shown that free will is an illusion.

The third section is titled 'Religion and Morals.' It deals with issues pertaining to faith, religious disagreement, morality, as well as more specific ethical questions such as hate speech, and the prospects of moral relativism. While many of these topics are not new to philosophy, the authors do a good job of offering new perspectives on these old issues. For example, in Jeff McMahan's 'The Meat Eaters', the question of whether we should eliminate carnivorous species is explored. McMahan argues that suffering is bad for those who experience it, and it would be best to 'prevent the vast suffering and countless deaths caused by predation' (p. 545). He thinks, therefore, that there is at least one good reason for thinking it would be a good thing if predatory animal species were to become extinct—provided this could occur without ecological damage. Although I anticipate many being alarmed by this 'heretical conclusion' (p. 545), McMahan offers a strong argument for it—one which will need to be taken seriously by those who object to it.

While I was impressed with the quality of essays in each of the previously mentioned sections, the fourth section, 'Society', was the highlight for me. It does a good job of showing how philosophical ways of thinking can bear upon contemporary societal issues. One example of this is Gary Gutting's 'Who Needs a Gun?' In this essay, Gutting addresses the recent gun violence that has occurred in the United States. He criticizes arguments that are typically offered for why we need guns. For example, he claims that it is 'beyond fantasy' (p. 684) that, in our time, a gun owner could oppose the force of a repressive government—a typical argument given for gun ownership. It is my hope that more philosophers contribute to debates such as this one in the future.

*The Stone Reader: Modern Philosophy in 133 Arguments* can be recommended to those new to philosophy, as well as to those with multiple stamps on their philosophical passport. For the newcomer, one will find a rich assortment of essays, largely free of any technical vocabulary, that span a large breadth of topics. For the experienced philosopher, one is likely to walk away with some new perspectives on familiar topics. It is an understatement, perhaps as large as the number of essays in this volume, to say that I have only been able to scratch the surface of *The Stone Reader* in this review. What I have hoped to convey is the importance, the scope, and the accessibility of the volume.

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