

# Why, and What, You Should Know About Central Asia

Ahmed Rashid

On the freezing night of December 12, 1991, in the heart of Central Asia, I stood on the icy tarmac of the airport outside Ashkhabad, the capital of the Soviet Republic of Turkmenistan, watching as the five former Communist Party bosses and future presidents of the republics of Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan arrived wearing fur coats and hats. The honor guard, the military band, and the dancing girls holding frozen flowers went through elaborate drills, shivering all the while as the dignitaries' planes landed.

It was a critical moment in the history of the world. Four days earlier Boris Yeltsin, president of Russia, and the leaders of Ukraine and Belarus had signed a treaty dissolving the Soviet Union. The

five republics were now suddenly independent but nobody had consulted the Central Asian leaders themselves. Angry, frustrated, fearful, feeling abandoned by their "mother Russia," and terrified about the consequences, the leaders sat up all night to discuss their future.

It was strange to see the heirs of conquerors of the world—Genghis Khan, Tamerlane, and Babar—so cowered. They were tied to Moscow in thousands of ways, from electricity grids to road, rail, and telephone networks. Central Asia had become a vast colony producing raw materials—cotton, wheat, metals, oil, and gas—for the Soviet industrial machine based in western Russia. They feared an economic and social collapse as Yeltsin cast them out of the empire. That night a deputy Turkmen foreign minister told me, "We are not celebrating—we are mourning our independence."

The next morning the leaders declared that they would all join the newly formed loose union called the Commonwealth of Independent States. There were doubts about the Central Asian states surviving and many of their 51 million people, members of some one hundred different ethnic groups, began to decamp for Russia. The birth of new nations had never taken place under so much doubt, fear, and lack of confidence by the very people being liberated.

It is important to remember this background when we look at Central Asia today, twenty-two years later and facing another momentous change—the departure of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan in 2014. The Central Asian countries have survived in spite of repression and lack of reforms in all five states, a civil war in



An Uzbek patrol in the Fergana Valley, on the Uzbekistan–Kyrgyzstan border, 2002

Tajikistan, and protests, massacres, and economic decline in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Only the energy-producing states of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have become more prosperous. Kazakhstan's GDP per capita, now \$13,900 in US dollars, and Turkmenistan's GDP per capita of \$8,500 together represent two thirds of the total GDP of Central Asia, according to the CIA's *World Factbook*. In contrast, Tajikistan's and Kyrgyzstan's GDPs per capita each stands at little over \$2,000.

Since September 11 and because of Central Asia's borders with Afghanistan, the big powers—Russia, China, and the US—are showing a renewed interest in the region. Until now the Central Asian leaders have manipulated one big power against another in an astute and ruthless game of trying to

extract the maximum benefit in loans, investment, weapons, or rent for bases.

As in 1991, Central Asia has reached a turning point and what comes next really worries it. Will the Taliban return to conquer Afghanistan and open the way for the Central Asian Islamist groups that are closely linked to al-Qaeda and have increased their forces while based in Pakistan? Will populist riots reminiscent of the Arab Spring sweep through the region? They have already done so twice in Kyrgyzstan, in March 2005 and April 2010, bringing down two presidents.

Will the weaker states, lacking economic resources, become hostage to China or Russia? Will the most important regional organization they all belong to—the Chinese-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)—help them overcome instability or will it

continue to help them avoid making serious reforms?

## China and Central Asia

None of the works under review provides the full answers to these questions, although Alexander Cooley's book, *Great Games, Local Rules*, comes closest. They all agree on the unprecedented rise of China's influence in Central Asia. Marlène Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse, scholars at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., demonstrate in *The Chinese Question in Central Asia* that China is already the dominant economic power in the region.

China has also taken care of one vital strategic interest since 1991: making sure that the Uighurs, China's largest Muslim ethnic group who live in the western province

of Xinjiang, do not seriously threaten to become independent and that the hundreds of thousands of Uighurs who live in Central Asia do not help them do so. During the 1950s large numbers of Uighurs fled the Maoist regime to seek shelter in Soviet Central Asia where they were relatively well treated.

After 1991 China put immense pressure on the three Central Asian states that border Xinjiang—Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan—to tightly restrict all Uighur political activity on their soil. China offered sweeteners such as resolving the border disputes that had plagued Chinese–Soviet relations in Central Asia for decades. Within a decade the borders between China and the Central Asian states were demarcated and settled, allowing for China's rapid economic involvement in the region.

Still, Uighur nationalism and Islamic militancy have continued to mount in Xinjiang, as China has inundated the province with Han Chinese and severely repressed the Muslims. While the Uighur populations in Central Asia have been largely silenced, some Uighurs have been training and fighting with the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

During the past decade China has invested heavily in Central Asia. Laruelle and Peyrouse write that

in less than ten years, China has positioned itself as one of the top three trading partners for each of the Central Asian states. It controls a quarter of Kazakh oil and has built a pipeline going from the Caspian Sea to Xinjiang; has become the preferred client of Turkmenistan for its gas exports; has transformed Kyrgyzstan into an economic quasi-protectorate that survives mainly on the re-export

### BOOKS AND REPORTS DISCUSSED IN THIS REVIEW

**The Chinese Question in Central Asia: Domestic Order, Social Change and the Chinese Factor**

by Marlène Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse.  
Columbia University Press,  
271 pp., \$60.00

**Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia**

by Alexander Cooley.  
Oxford University Press,  
252 pp., \$29.95

**Central Asia and Afghanistan: Insulation on the Silk Road, Between Eurasia and the Heart of Asia**

a report  
by Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh.  
Peace Research Institute Oslo,  
62 pp., available at [www.prio.no](http://www.prio.no)

**Restless Valley: Revolution, Murder and Intrigue in the Heart of Central Asia**

by Philip Shishkin.  
Yale University Press,  
316 pp., \$28.00

**China's Central Asian Problem**

a report by the  
International Crisis Group.  
35 pp., available at [www.crisis.group.org](http://www.crisis.group.org).



of Chinese products, and Tajikistan into a privileged gateway to its presence in Afghanistan.

The findings of the two authors seem to me vital for any serious discussion of China's future geopolitical role in Asia. Their trade figures show the remarkable pace of Chinese investment. In 2002 China's trade with Central Asia was no more than \$1 billion. In 2006 it reached \$10 billion and by 2010, \$28 billion. In contrast, Russia's trade with Central Asia in 2010 was just \$15 billion. China has broken the economic connections that traditionally tied Central Asia to Russia.

China also broke Russia's monopoly of Kazakh oil and Turkmen natural gas. Now two Chinese-built pipelines, one originating in Atyrau on the Kazakh shores of the Caspian Sea and the other in Turkmenistan, carry respectively oil and gas across the length of Central Asia to Xinjiang from which new pipelines are being built to China's industrial heartland on the coast. The gas pipeline will soon have spurs that will mop up further gas output in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and eventually Afghanistan. Cooley described in an interview "a growing sucking sound coming from the East." These Central Asian energy supplies provide China with enormous security, since they much reduce Chinese dependence on seaborne imports of energy, which the US could try to limit.

However, China also faces much hostility in Central Asia, as it does elsewhere in the third world, for the ways it

exploits the region while offering little in return. Chinese companies bring their own workers and equipment, refusing to hire locally, carry out local job training, or buy large quantities of local goods and produce. It is common to hear conspiracy theories about China buying up agricultural land in Central Asia or settling millions of its peasant farmers there. Central Asian people fear Chinese influence even as their leaders embrace China, which does not question them about their lack of democracy or human rights, or their reluctance to introduce economic reform. The West is considered too intrusive.

According to "China's Central Asia Problem," a recent report by the International Crisis Group:

China's business practices are providing a negative image in a region where suspicions of China... are already high... China sees a certain affinity between Central Asia's authoritarian regimes and its own, and in public, at least, defends them with similar rhetoric.

The report suggests that China's current trade and investment practices in Central Asia cannot last forever without more visible concern to improve the lives of the local population. Yet China appears to be repeating the same policies in Afghanistan, with which it shares a fifty-mile border in the Wakhan corridor. During the past decade it has refused to give serious help to the Afghans, whether in providing security or developing infrastructure. Over the last twelve years it has provided barely \$2 billion in economic

aid to Afghanistan—less than what a much poorer India has provided with many more enlightened projects.

Yet again China is making contracts for Afghan raw materials as they become available. China has invested \$3.5 billion in the Aynak copper mine near Kabul and has made offers for several oil fields in northern Afghanistan. No doubt opening up Afghanistan's mineral wealth to the market will provide desperately needed income to Kabul and in the long term help stabilize Afghanistan; but digging for minerals will have to wait until the war ends. China has the patience to wait out the civil war that may well continue after 2014, but there is still no guarantee that China will provide jobs, carry out job training, or actually invest in the Afghan people and their economic future.

China has brought the Central Asian states into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which both China and Central Asia consider as their most relevant multinational organization. Established in 1996 as the Shanghai Five, the SCO now includes four Central Asian states, Russia, and China—Turkmenistan professes neutrality and is not a member—while southern neighbors such as Iran, Pakistan, and India are trying to become full members. For many Western analysts, the SCO is a paper organization, unable to undertake joint military operations against terrorism or create greater unity among the Central Asian leaders, who are notorious for their unwillingness to cooperate with one another.

Yet China's main aims have been achieved. The SCO, under its influence, has conveniently buried the Uighur

problem under the slogan of fighting the three evils of "terrorism, separatism, and extremism," which as far as the Chinese are concerned refer less to al-Qaeda than to the Uighurs. China commands overwhelming influence with the Central Asian regimes, who have provided it with a transport and trade door opening into Russia, Turkey, and the Caucasus.

Will China take a responsible part in both Central Asia and Afghanistan in the years ahead, contributing its diplomatic power to a regional peace settlement, helping to build infrastructure, and encouraging economic reforms in the poorest Central Asian states where it exerts the most influence? Or will it continue to be a greedy, extractive power shying off from political responsibilities in Central Asia and leaving the mess in Afghanistan for others to clean up?

So far the Chinese have refused to help with peacemaking in Afghanistan or in negotiations with the Taliban—something they could contribute to. They have enormous influence in Pakistan, where the Taliban leadership is based. Nor have they allowed the SCO to get involved in a regional settlement after 2014 when US forces leave Afghanistan. Only China will have the economic strength and political goodwill to make peace, as well as the resources to fill the coming power vacuum—but the question is whether it will be willing to take responsibility.

*The US and Russia in Central Asia*

The US in Central Asia has been no less myopic than China. Cooley, an

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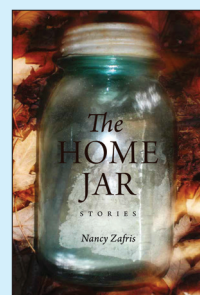
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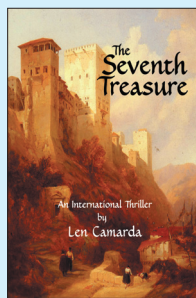
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American scholar at Columbia University, and Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, an Iranian-born scholar at Paris's Sciences Po, are well known as the leading scholars of Central Asia. They do not disappoint. Cooley's book offers the most lucid and well-written account to date of America's ten-year involvement in Central Asia. Both he and Tadjbakhsh, who writes for a Norwegian think tank, agree that the US has lacked a strategic direction in Central Asia.

Instead, since 2001, three American administrations including the present one have given priority to military cooperation with Central Asian states in order to assist US and NATO tasks in Afghanistan. This has automatically led Central Asian leaders to ignore and dismiss parallel US demands for political liberalization, respect for human rights, and economic reforms. Central Asia is one more example of how militarized US foreign policy has become since 2001.

In *Great Games, Local Rules*, Cooley goes much further, investigating how the US Central Command (CENTCOM) has often undermined the State Department and other parts of the US government by continuing to dish out money or favors to the Central Asian leaders and their ubiquitous intelligence services, although the official US line has been to curtail aid. This was especially true after President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan ordered his troops to open fire on a demonstration in Andijan in the Fergana Valley in 2005, killing as many as eight hundred people. CENTCOM continued to fund the Uzbek military even though the State Department had cooled US relations with Karimov. "The Central Asian governments' commitments to protecting political rights and human rights norms... have been shredded in the name of counterterrorism," Cooley writes.

The main US and NATO interest has been to maintain bases in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, and to do so they have tolerated and even fostered widespread corruption among the ruling elites. According to Cooley, after 2008 substantial payoffs were necessary to get the acquiescence of the Central Asian elites to establish the Northern Distribution Network (NDN)—the road and rail network spanning the Eurasian landmass that provides supplies to Western forces in Afghanistan. This was an alternative to the Pakistan route. "It seems that maintaining US operations in Afghanistan necessitates tolerating and actively contributing to Central Asia's corruption and governance problems," Cooley writes. Now that the US needs to move troops and equipment out of Afghanistan, it will become more dependent on the NDN for which the Central Asian states will doubtless extract high fees from it.

Since 2011 the US has tried to promote a much broader vision for the Central Asian region called the "Silk Route strategy," which involves building large-scale infrastructure projects that could help unite the region. These include the long-awaited gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan across southern Afghanistan, a national railway system for Afghanistan, and the transfer of electricity from Kyrgyzstan to Afghanistan and Pakistan. But such a strategy won't be carried out for a long time. It depends on making peace

with the Taliban and a comprehensive regional settlement with all of Afghanistan's direct neighbors—China, Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan—and significant near neighbors—India, Russia, and Saudi Arabia. None of this looks likely.

Russia has contradictory policies in Central Asia and Afghanistan. It helped the US establish bases in Central Asia but then it tried to force those states to cancel the agreements on those bases. It says it would like the US to leave Afghanistan and is adamant that NATO should not leave behind a residual force after 2014, but at the same time it is fearful of the consequences of the continuing drug trade and Taliban influence and is quietly

have failed to carry out the political and economic reforms that have been made in some of the other former Soviet states. Their internal rivalries and fierce competition among their leaders have resulted in a lack of cooperation and led to large-scale failure. On that freezing night in December 1991, the leaders pledged to form an economic union in order to survive, yet nothing of the sort happened. There is no cooperation on desperately important issues such as water distribution, electricity generation and distribution, or controlling drugs and terrorists from Afghanistan.

In "Central Asia and Afghanistan," Tadjbakhsh shows how each of the Central Asian states has a different

services in dramatic decline and security forces weak.

Now some of the leaders would like to see their relatives succeed them.

Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan and Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan have each been in power for twenty-three years. According to human rights groups, Karimov has kept some ten thousand political prisoners in jail over the years, and torture by such methods as boiling people alive is well known. Turkmenistan's first president, Saparmurat Niyazov, who died in 2006, was obsessed with visions of grandeur before his death, accumulating an estimated \$2 billion from gas sales in his personal bank accounts. Tajikistan's elite remains in power, according to some accounts, partly through its involvement in the drug trade from Afghanistan.

The most pressing and dangerous political crisis could be generated by infighting over the battle for succession of the two leaders of the two most powerful states, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Karimov, seventy-five, and Nazarbayev, seventy-three, are old, ill, and frail and it is wholly unclear who will succeed them. Karimov's powerful, ruthless, and at the same time glamorous daughter Gulnara, forty-one, is tipped as a possible successor although many powerful Uzbeks will oppose her. Disaffection is spreading in Uzbekistan with rising food prices, unemployment, the worsening of education and health services, and widespread corruption.

In Kazakhstan, Dinara Nazarbayeva Kulibaeva, forty-five, one of the president's three daughters, is married to Timur Kulibaev, a billionaire businessman now head of KazEnergy, who is a favorite of the president and could succeed him. Any battle between competing factions for succession could turn bloody as state security agencies and clans mobilize on different sides.

The weird, the strange, the corrupt, and the grand are all evident in Philip Shishkin's *Restless Valley: Revolution, Murder, and Intrigue in the Heart of Central Asia*. He writes primarily about Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan—at opposite ends of the political spectrum. Tiny Kyrgyzstan has a population of just 5.5 million people who live in the highest mountain ranges in the world, with no resources except sheep herding and income from a single gold mine. They have tried hard to become a democratic state—overthrowing two presidents to do so. The result, not surprisingly, has been more misery and much chaos.

Shishkin, an American journalist of Russian origin, captures these events in a far corner of the world with breathless and poetic prose. Unfortunately he is not much interested either in history—something vital to understanding the region—or in Islam, which remains critical to the people of Central Asia despite the seventy years of Soviet atheism. Instead, he relentlessly pursues and then tells the stories of the most corrupt and powerful and also the most sincere and admirable characters who inhabit these mountains. His chapter on the 2005 Andijan massacre in Uzbekistan is particularly fascinating because he was one of the few Western journalists in Uzbekistan at the time, although he was stopped from entering



Uzbek President Islam Karimov, Chinese President Hu Jintao, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, and Tajik President Emomali Rahmon at a summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Astana, Kazakhstan, June 2011

urging the US not to totally abandon the region. Russia chastises Central Asian states such as Uzbekistan for getting too close to the US, but at the same time it has encouraged them to set up the NDN network and other facilities favored by the US. Whereas twenty years ago Central Asia could not conceive of thwarting Russia's interests, today the Central Asian states regularly defy and exploit Russia, favoring the US and China.

solution to the future of Afghanistan, while none of them is willing to relinquish its claims on resources for the betterment of the region. She maintains that the leaders' rivalries are shaped by the larger geopolitical rivalry between China, Russia, and the US, but that is not entirely true. Local rivalries have worsened during the past two decades as each regime has offered more and more corrupt, power-hungry, visionless leadership rather than hope for change. The ICG report states:

#### The Reign of Dictators

By and large the Central Asian states, apart from tiny Kyrgyzstan, remain dictatorships. For twenty years they

Large parts of Central Asia look more insecure and unstable by the year. Corruption is endemic, criminalisation of the political establishment widespread, social





the city until after the stacks of dead bodies had been cleared away.

Tadjbakhsh writes that the Central Asian countries “realize that the situation in Afghanistan remains very unstable, with prospects of renewed conflict, which could bleed into their region in terms of refugees”—as well as warlordism and drug trafficking.

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Islamic Jihad Union have grown in size and their ideology has become more radical in their years of exile. The IMU posed a major threat to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 2000. It subsequently joined with both al-Qaeda and the Taliban and its leaders are now, after a twelve-year sojourn in Pakistan’s tribal areas, trying to re-enter Central Asia via Afghanistan.

This year alone US and NATO special forces in northern Afghanistan have carried out twelve operations against IMU cells, four of them in the province of Kunduz, which is adjacent to Tajikistan. At least two cell leaders have been captured.

Moreover, the IMU ranks are now largely made up of a variety of Turkic nationalities ranging from Chechens, Turkmens, and Uighurs to ethnic Turks and even Turkish migrants born in Germany. The IMU also recruits from non-Turkic groups such as Tajiks, Pakistanis, and Kashmiris. Elements of the powerful Pakistani group Lashkar-e-Taiba are also close working allies of the IMU.

The Central Asian states’ ability to combat these extremist groups would be more successful if they had a common approach toward peacemaking in Afghanistan, but they do not. “The

lack of a common approach towards Afghanistan mirrors the lack of intra-regional cooperation and a common security strategy within [Central Asia] itself,” writes Tadjbakhsh. Every country in Central Asia promotes a different strategy.

Tumultuous changes could well be in store—both internally as the Central Asian states are forced into greater reforms and democratization through pressure from below, and by policies pursued by the regional big powers. That the US is more or less exiting the region, while Russia faces a deep economic and political crisis that is unacknowledged by its leaders, will leave China in an even stronger position in Central Asia and Afghanistan. What, if anything, China, with all its strength, may do in the region is a mystery.

Sir Halford Mackinder, the

nineteenth-century political theorist, viewed Central Asia as “the pivot region of the world’s politics” and “the heartland” because, he said, “it is the greatest natural fortress in the world.” He reckoned that whoever controlled Central Asia would exercise enormous power. But no power has achieved control there and the battle for influence will take different directions after 2014. One of the great dangers for the US and other Western powers will be continuing ignorance and neglect of what is happening there.\* □

\*Some information for this essay comes from my own two books on Central Asia: *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism?* (Zed, 1994) and *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (Yale University Press, 2002; Penguin, 2003).

## Neuroscience & Philosophy: An Exchange

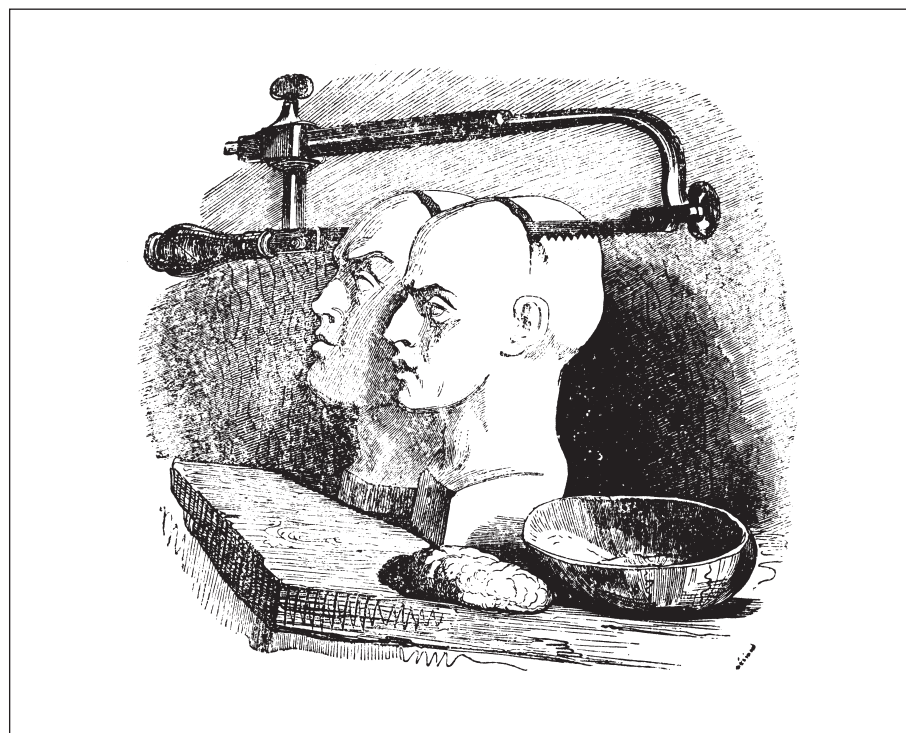
To the Editors:

In my response to Colin McGinn [“What Can Your Neurons Tell You?,” *NYR*, July 11] I don’t wish to enter into the philosophical debate between philosophers and neuroscientists. Even if it is much needed, it requires extensive developments that are being carried out in different circles. I shall be concerned here by facts as they are reported in his *NYR* review.

First of all I am shocked by the overall arrogant style of his review. The use of the attributes “fallacy” or “confusion,” if still employed by some philosophers, does not belong to a dialogue between a scientist and a philosopher. Differences of opinion or of interpretation are more acceptable terms. Time has passed since Auguste Comte’s suggested hierarchy of disciplines. There is no reason today for philosophers to give “lessons” to anybody, scientists in particular. McGinn might read Bourdieu’s book on “distinction” to question his attitude. I see the relation between neuroscientists and philosophers in a much more positive and constructive manner, as a fruitful cooperation to understand, jointly, the “mind-brain” and to evaluate the consequences of the constantly progressing field of neuroscience—from the molecular to the cognitive level—on both theoretical and practical aspects of human productions. There are at present quite a number of philosophers like John Searle, Daniel Dennett, or Ned Block who play this role.

One has to be aware that the categories that McGinn utilizes in his judgments might no longer be up to date in the present context of developing neuroscience. On the contrary, they need to be deconstructed and reformulated to avoid the solipsism of judging with a given set of values another set of values from a different discipline. Notwithstanding his opinion, there are no more “essential” values coming from his own philosophy. I consider it to be a challenge of the twenty-first century to rebuild the glorious encyclopedic multidisciplinary of the *Siècle des Lumières*.

Second, the issues raised by *The Good, the True, and the Beautiful: A Neuronal Approach* to tentatively envision a multidisciplinary research program between neuroscience and the humanities go far beyond the book itself and shall be presented elsewhere. In this context, the first goal of the critic is to understand what the other means, rather than playing games by isolating sentences from their context and making erroneous conclusions about the author. Four examples among many others illustrate these views.



(a) There is a misunderstanding about the title and contents of the book. The title specifies “a neuronal approach,” not a “neuronal explanation.” The aim of the book is to provide neuroscientific data to launch a research program on “the good, the true, and the beautiful,” as was initially debated within the walls of the Collège de France during the past decade but still requires extensive future efforts to approach completion.

(b) I never meant to reduce art to a symbolic intersubjective communication... If McGinn had carefully read the book and other writings on this question, I do not at all reduce art to this definition: I have devoted chapters in the book and elsewhere to define and document the “rules of art,” which precisely attempt to specify artistic activity compared to other social activities.

(c) I never said that lower animal species don’t show signs of consciousness. If interested McGinn could read my Ferrier Lecture, “The Molecular Biology of Consciousness Investigated with Genetically Modified Mice,” from the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*...and also meditate on what I have called repeatedly the “levels of consciousness.” While a worm, a fly, or even a mouse may show some attributes of conscious processing, certainly they do not reach the level that characterizes human beings.

(d) I always intentionally tried to avoid the word “correlates” in the relationship

between “brain and mind,” in my opinion based upon a preconceived dualist position. My goal, as a molecular neuroscientist, has always been to find ways, with considerable difficulties, to establish *causal* relationships between states of activity of neural networks and mental or behavioral activities, taking into account the multiple nested levels of brain organization. Other scientists or philosophers may not adopt this view. But it is a central theme for a productive debate between science and epistemology. However it needs an *emendatio intellectus*, that is far from the “mysterianism” position adopted by our philosopher that human minds are unable to understand consciousness. The remarkable progress in the neurosciences in recent years cannot be dismissed as mere “neuromania,” except perhaps by an observer suffering from acute “neurophobia.”

Jean-Pierre Changeux  
Collège de France  
Paris, France

Colin McGinn replies:

I have no objection to neuroscience as such: it is a fascinating and reputable scientific subject. My objection concerns the intellectual overreaching in which many of its practitioners engage—the tendency to assume that it can tell us much more than it really can. There is a general movement out

there to subsume both psychology and philosophy under the neuroscience umbrella. Changeux’s book is unmistakably part of this effort of subsumption. He suggests that Plato’s interest in the good, the beautiful, and the true can be replaced by an approach based on neuroscience, so that traditional modes of philosophical inquiry can be superseded. This attitude is clear in his letter when he writes: “One has to be aware that the categories that McGinn utilizes in his judgments might no longer be up to date in the present context of developing neuroscience.” In my review I was disagreeing with this general point of view, defending traditional philosophical inquiry against the putative hegemony of neuroscience. This is not a criticism of neuroscience; it is a criticism of the attempt to replace philosophy with neuroscience (what Patricia Churchland calls “neurophilosophy”).

Changeux objects to my use of the words “fallacy” and “confusion.” These are harsh words, I know, but it seems to me, for the reasons I gave in the review, that the words are apt. It is a simple fallacy to confuse the subject matter of a psychological state, such as a belief or a perception, with the psychological state itself (the fallacy of “psychologism”). Changeux writes: “There is no reason today for philosophers to give ‘lessons’ to anybody, scientists in particular.” Indeed, there is no reason for philosophers to try to instruct scientists in science, but there is plenty of reason for philosophers to try to instruct scientists in *philosophical* concepts and theories. Many scientists stray from their area of expertise into philosophical territory—often hoping to sort out those poor antiquated philosophers who know no science—and the result is often sheer philosophical naiveté. This has been very conspicuous recently in the area of the mind-body problem, where philosophy has developed a very sophisticated understanding of the issues; and where the intrepid neuroscientist could use a bit of philosophical instruction before rashly wading in. There is no reason why there should not be fruitful cooperation here, but a dismissive attitude toward philosophy is not helpful.

Changeux’s suggestion that philosophical categories need to be “deconstructed and reformulated” to keep up with neuroscience is an example of the mistaken view I am opposing. The idea that, say, the is-ought distinction has been rendered obsolete by neuroscience is quite absurd to anyone who understands the issues. This is like supposing that classical logic has been undermined by botany.

I do not accept that I was “playing games by isolating sentences from their con-