

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-42434-9 - Spectacles and Predicaments: Essays in Social Theory

Ernest Gellner

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## SPECTACLES & PREDICAMENTS

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-42434-9 - Spectacles and Predicaments: Essays in Social Theory

Ernest Gellner

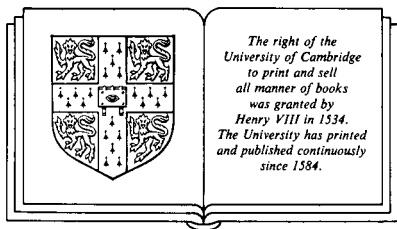
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ERNEST GELLNER

# *Spectacles & Predicaments*

ESSAYS IN SOCIAL THEORY



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE

NEW YORK PORT CHESTER

MELBOURNE SYDNEY

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-42434-9 - Spectacles and Predicaments: Essays in Social Theory  
Ernest Gellner  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521424349](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521424349)

© Cambridge University Press 1979

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1979  
First paperback edition 1991  
Re-issued in this digitally printed version 2009

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Gellner, Ernest.  
Spectacles and predicaments.

Bibliography: p.  
Includes indexes.

1. Philosophy – Addresses, essays, lectures. 2. Social sciences – Addresses, essays, lectures. 3. Political science – Addresses, essays, lectures.

I. Title.  
B63.G44 120 78–67304

ISBN 978-0-521-22486-4 hardback  
ISBN 978-0-521-42434-9 paperback

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-42434-9 - Spectacles and Predicaments: Essays in Social Theory

Ernest Gellner

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Contents

	Editorial Preface by I. C. Jarvie and J. Agassi	vii
	Introduction	i
Part I	<i>Understanding humanity</i>	
1	The Absolute in braces	13
2	Ethnomethodology: the re-enchantment industry or the Californian way of subjectivity	41
3	A Wittgensteinian philosophy of (or against) the Social sciences	65
4	Period piece	103
5	Chomsky	111
6	Notes towards a theory of ideology	117
Part II	<i>The cognitive predicament</i>	
7	Options of belief	135
8	The pure enquirer	148
9	An ethic of cognition	164
10	Beyond truth and falsehood, or no method in my madness	182
11	The last pragmatist, or the behaviourist Platonist	199
12	Pragmatism and the importance of being earnest	241
Part III	<i>The political predicament</i>	
13	Nationalism, or the new confessions of a justified Edinburgh sinner	265
14	A social contract in search of an idiom: the demise of the Danegeld state	277
15	The withering away of the dentistry state	307
16	From <i>the</i> Revolution to liberalisation	318

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-42434-9 - Spectacles and Predicaments: Essays in Social Theory

Ernest Gellner

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

	<i>Contents</i>	vi
17	Plaidoyer pour une libéralisation manquée	334
18	Gone and gone forever	341
19	The Kathmandu option	350
	Sources	368
	Bibliography of Gellner, 1972–78	370
	Name index	375
	Subject index	378

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-42434-9 - Spectacles and Predicaments: Essays in Social Theory

Ernest Gellner

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Editorial Preface

In the five years that have elapsed since we sent to press the third volume of Gellner's selected papers – *The Devil in Modern Philosophy* – his rate of scholarly output has, if anything, increased. Most notable is the rate at which he has produced long and substantial papers. In editing Gellner's work our original aim was to bring it to greater public attention. Our effort has been fortunate in achieving this goal. If, in addition, we have in any way encouraged the author and helped raise his output, then we are highly gratified.

The papers to be found in the present collection have been selected and edited with an eye to their coherence and unity. The three parts of this collection contain papers all of which show the same concerns, approached only under different headings. Part I is primarily, but only primarily, about philosophers and their philosophy, Part II is more about the cognitive implications of philosophy and Part III more about the political applications of philosophy. As ever, Gellner begins as a critic, expounds alternative views of his own, and applies them to current concerns.

The most characteristic quality of Gellner's output in general, and in this volume in particular, is the fusion of philosophy and the social sciences. There are philosophers who frown at such fusions – at any fusion – and there are those who tolerate them for pedagogical purposes. In Gellner's work the fusion persists because the problems on which he reflects lead over old boundaries, the problems lead us to consider whether there is here a fusion at all, or rather an approach that starts from a very different kind of separation. The test of this should be, of course, how does his philosophy treat the old borders. This leads to a simple problem, from Gellner's vantage point, and, indeed, he meets the problem repeatedly and with an in-

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-42434-9 - Spectacles and Predicaments: Essays in Social Theory

Ernest Gellner

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Editorial preface*

viii

fectious and unflinching fascination: what do professional philosophers have to say about everyday life, about society? He animadvert on this, and he offers his own views, both about philosophers' views of society, and about society as he sees and examines it in detail, studying its diverse forms, i.e. the industrialised world, capitalist and socialist. He develops a political and social philosophy meant to be suitable for our time, to answer the theoretical and practical problems it poses to us all, philosophers as well as common men who feel responsible enough to want to think them out. Or, perhaps we should say he does only some of the preliminary work in that direction; perhaps one can only credit him with an attempt to discuss what is on the agenda, what are the more significant and urgent questions at issue. For example, he has long poured scorn on academic philosophers who advocated moral or cognitive relativism. In this volume he makes quite explicit his view that not only is relativism a recipe for disaster, but that the endorsement of and the preoccupation with modern empirical science is itself based on a moral imperative. Discussing the problems of Britain or of Czechoslovakia he continues to be exploratory and tentative. Czechoslovakia does not show that liberalisation is impossible, Britain does not show that liberal societies can never harm themselves. As ever, Gellner is concerned with major decisions regarding social science and social policy. Most political thinkers are, he claims, trying to decide what will happen and arguing about what should happen. This is, he remarks, mostly like reading the entrails. Rather, he urges, the question is whether proceduralism or substantivism will prevail; his guess is that both will co-exist for some time.

None of this should suggest that we endorse Gellner's political views, or even that we share his outlook in detail. It is simply that we find his work valuable enough, thought-provoking enough, to deserve greater accessibility than it has scattered through the back runs of diverse serials. Collection highlights its unity and coherence, and hence is a treat for the public.

*Toronto**Boston and Tel Aviv*

I. C. Jarvie

J. Agassi