Pooh, The Great Bear

Foreword
The extracts in this paper are taken from:

INTRODUCTION: The Pooh Stories from a philosophical perspective
A.N. Whitehead tells us that the European philosophic tradition consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.

J. T. Williams suggests, The European philosophical tradition consists of a `series of instructions to Winnie the Pooh’.

Pooh describes himself as a Bear of Very Little Brain. Here, as with Socrates, the profession of stupidity was a mask.

Eeyore represents the stoic tradition. Stoicism stressed duty and regarded the universe as governed by fate and through rationality one learns to accept events with a stern and tranquil mind.

Piglet is rich in allusions to moral philosophy.

Owl is a satire on academic philosophy, priding itself on detachment from everyday life.

Tigger illustrates the importance of secondary motives. This aligns with John Stuart Mill’s version of Utilitarianism. Acts are not right or obligatory because of their inherent character, but because of how much overall human or sentient well-being they produce.

Rabbit is an example of the bureaucratic mind – benevolent but an enemy of the free co-operative harmony of the world of Pooh.

Beetle represents those who seek a quiet, safe life. The Beetle, Alexander, was upset because he was always being told to be quiet “Hush”, he buried his head in a crack in the ground for two days until the danger was over and then lived with his aunt ever-afterwards.

The honey parable
The significance of honey (HUNNY) has often been ignored through superficial readings of Milne’s work. What was it Winnie-the-Pooh was really seeking?

We read in the Bible that John the Baptist fed on “locusts and wild honey”; we know that Matthew Arnold associates honey with “the two noblest of things, which are sweetness and light.” and that in the hymn, heavenly Jerusalem is described as “with milk and honey blest”. There are many examples indicating that honey was a symbol of a spiritual quest and reward.

We can conclude, then, that the primary meaning of honey in this parable is philosophical truth.
Pooh as cosmologist

The early Greek philosophers were cosmologists, enquiring into the nature of the universe. For example, Anaximander thought the earth was shaped like a giant cylinder and was always at rest. Later Pythagoreans taught that the earth was round and revolved around a central fire (alter of Zeus). Aristotle repeated that the earth was round but regarded it as stationary and placed in the centre of the universe.

It is interesting that Pooh invites Piglet to stay with him. Piglet is a faithful but often uncomprehending disciple. It was a tradition of great philosophers to take a favourite pupil to reside with them. (Were Pooh and Piglet in the same relationship which in ancient Greek times often involved the exchange of sexual favours for intellectual training?)

Considering Pooh`s balloon adventure

First, Pooh heard a buzzing noise and said to himself,

`That buzzing noise means something. You don't get a buzzing noise like that, just buzzing and buzzing, without meaning something. If there's a buzzing-noise, somebody's making a buzzing-noise, and the only reason I KNOW OF is because you are a bee.  (Thinking) ............. And the only reason for being a bee that I know of is making honey. (He sat up) `And the only reason for making honey is so I can eat it.  (So he began to climb the tree).

Pooh, getting close to the bees experienced the burning pain of a bee sting, symbolising the philosophical pain of discarding a cherished hypothesis. “These are the wrong sort of bees.... so I think they would make the wrong sort of honey.” Later Pooh`s arms were so stiff from holding on to the string of the balloon all that time that they stayed up straight in the air for more than a week {we keep hold of our beliefs regardless of experience.}

The Birthday Party

Here again we meet the Socratic pretence of ignorance. ****

Pooh and Rationalism

René Descartes (1596-1650) sought a proposition which could not be doubted. He came up with `I think, therefore I am`. But Descartes has been criticized for taking the meaning of “I” for granted. We recognise that dialogue and situation highlights the problematic nature of the simple word “I”. Take the example of the tale of Pooh when he `Goes Visiting and Gets into a Tight Place`. He calls down rabbit`s burrow,

“Is anyone at home?”
“No” said a voice
“Isn’t there anybody here at all?”
“Nobody”
“Hello, Rabbit, isn’t that you?”
“No” said Rabbit....................................................
“But this is Me”
“What sort of Me?”
“Pooh Bear”
” Are you sure?”
“Quite, quite sure”
“Oh, well, then, come in.”

In summary we can say that Winnie the Pooh is an overwhelming refutation of Descartes’ theory that animals are mere automata.

**The Expedition to the North Pole:**

In this episode even the smallest animal existed independently of any observing mind. The Beetle, Alexander, who regardless of his minor role in the stories is strongly representative of a character who tries to avoid conflict as he is a fearful creature.

And the last and smallest friend-and-relation was so upset to find the whole Expedition saying “Hush” to him, that he buried himself head down-wards in a crack in the ground, and stayed there for two days until the danger was over, and then went home in a great hurry, and lived quietly ever-afterwards with his aunt.

This is reminiscent of the philosopher, Samuel Alexander (1859-1938) who himself disliked argument and sought to demonstrate the independent reality of the material world.

**Rabbit’s Plan to Capture Baby Roo**

1. **General Remarks** Kanga runs faster than any of US, even me.
2. **More General Remarks.** Kanga never takes her eyes off Baby Roo, except when he’s safely buttoned up in her pocket.
3. **Therefore.** If we are to capture Boby Roo, we must get a Long Start, because Kanga runs faster than US, even me.
4. **A Thought.** If Roo had jumped out of Kanga’s pocket and Piglet had jumped in, Kanga wouldn’t know the difference because Piglet is a small animal.
5. Like Roo.
6. But Kanga would have to be looking the other way first, so as not to see Piglet jumping in.
7. See 2
8. **Another thought.** But is Pooh was talking to her very excitedly, she might look the other way for a moment.
9. And I could quickly run away with Roo.
10. Quickly.
11. **And Kanga would discover the difference until Afterwards.**

This reminds us quite forcibly of the way in which **Barch (Benedictus) Spinoza (1632-1677)** sets out his theories in numbered propositions, proofs and corollaries. In addition, the way in which Pooh enjoys Rabbit’s hospitality to such a degree that on his way out he gets stuck in the doorway reminding us of Spinoza’s comment, “After that enjoyment follows pain.”

**Pooh and the Heffalump**

Looking at **David Hume (1711-1776)**’s hypothetico-deductive approach to factual problems, Pooh concludes that Heffalump was a mere name without any corresponding reality. In addition, when engaging with the great flood, Pooh considers that if a bottle can float, then a jar can float and adds “I can sit on top of it if it is a very big jar.”