

The *Wednesday*

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Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

Editorial

Philosophy and the Genius

Kant introduced the idea of the genius in his *Critique of Judgment*. He defined *Genius* as ‘the talent (natural endowment) which gives the rule to art.’ He also added that: ‘*Genius* is the innate mental aptitude through which nature gives the rule to art’ Kant attributed originality to the genius. The genius sets the rules, others follow. But then Kant didn’t want to claim that the genius produced any knowledge. If he did, that would contradict his own philosophy. Philosophy for Kant was conceptual and not based on a non-sensory intuition. Hegel also rejected the role of genius in philosophy.

Kant was not concerned with the imagination in its productive role, something the post-Kantian will celebrate. He also did not allow intellectual (non-sensory) intuition for an intelligence like ours. But then Kant limited knowledge to the realm of possible experience, and the possibility of a genius reaching beyond the realm of experience and producing knowledge and philosophy was out of the question for him.

Contrary to Kant, Schelling saw the task of philosophy as that of going beyond the realm of possible experience to capturing the principle of philosophy beyond discursive thought. It is to be allied with art and aesthetic intuition, which is the mark of the genius. The Romantics produced the idea of the genius in its strong metaphysical version. For them, genius is needed whenever discursive thoughts are not able to reach a resolution of contradictory views or produce original and rule-creating work. Novalis saw the genius as a synthesiser or a ‘reunion of opposites’. Schelling saw aesthetics (art and poetry, both associated with the genius) as capable of producing the needed synthesis to get over the dualism of Idealism and Realism.

Schelling says in his *System of Transcendental Idealism*: ‘Genius is thus marked off from everything

that consists in mere talent or skill by the fact that through it a contradiction is resolved.’ He concludes his book with a remarkable declaration: ‘Philosophy was born and nourished by poetry in the infancy of knowledge, and with it all those sciences it has guided towards perfection; we may thus expect them, on completion, to flow back like so many individual streams into the universal ocean of poetry from which they took their source.’

The genius was reproduced again in Schopenhauer’s philosophy but from the point of view of the spectator of art and nature rather than that of the creative artist.

Nietzsche also mentioned the genius in his aristocratic philosophy. He associated it in his *Twilight of the Idols* with ‘great men’ or heroes. He thought that they are like energy stored through generations that will burst forth in time. The age when it does so is incidental to the genius; ‘the great person is an end; the period of greatness, for example, the Renaissance, is an end.’ But the genius is also ‘necessarily a squanderer: his greatness lies in his expenditure...The instinct for self-preservation is, so to speak, unhinged; the overwhelming pressure of energies, streaming out from him forbids him any such care and caution.’

This must have been the last outcry for the genius by a well-known philosopher. Since then the idea has been eclipsed, possibly due to increased democratisation and the increased emphasis on the role of the social environment in creating talent and works of art. The change from the enchanted age to a modern, scientific, non-holistic age is also to be blamed.

We have lamented the decline of the idea of the romantic hero in a previous editorial, and we may have to do the same here with the idea of the genius.

The Editor

Naturalism and the 'Expansive Naturalist'

I would like to discuss a few issues related to the topic of naturalism, starting with a bit of history. (This links to the article on Charles Taylor's book *A Secular Age* which I wrote on in *The Wednesday Issue 138*).

PAUL COCKBURN

In the medieval world we were connected in a deep, almost supernatural way to the non-human world: storms, famines etc. are acts of God, not just instances of exceptionless laws which is what science tells us they are. Shakespeare in his plays seems to link the health of society to nature: when things are going well in the human world, the sun shines on us and nature is benevolent. Then we move on to the scientific world-view. Descartes had a picture of the world dominated by mind and mechanics, he thought animals were machines. We don't think that any more, and science has marched on from mechanics to biology so to speak with Darwin. Living things are adapted to their environment, they occupy a *natural* niche in *nature* so to speak.

The words nature and natural are interesting. The origin of the word nature is to do with being born and growing. Most people would agree with the statement 'we are natural beings in a natural world'. But what does that phrase really mean? Does a natural occurrence mean it is just something we observe many times in our experience so that it is normal? It does have that connotation, but we would also now say that a volcanic explosion, a rare event, is natural even though we cannot predict it, but we can explain it scientifically to some extent.

If we look at all the myriad fields of science then empiricism is key. Many would say we should avoid anything metaphysical and ensure any theoretical claims we make are empirically grounded. So, we observe something, and we can explain it by a theory.

God could be outside nature, and we have the position of some deists that God could have started the universe off and then He retired. However, another position is we do not need metaphysics, God or the supernatural, everything can be explained (or will be) by the natural sciences. Certainly the scientific method seems to give us the most certain knowledge we have, but is that knowledge by definition limited i.e. it does not cover all areas of our lives, and it cannot answer the 'big' questions such as the purpose of our lives.

At this point I would like to bring in a theologian called Fiona Ellis. She talks of the 'expansive naturalist'. She says we should not limit our knowledge to what is covered by scientific enquiry. We can allow other explanations. Maybe we can allow some metaphysics. Scientific theories are often mathematical laws, which often seem to be metaphysical in that they apply universally throughout the universe (as far as we know), they are powerful theories and can perhaps be regarded as metaphysical. Natural forces such as gravity are governed by strict laws – why is this so?

One key area that science needs to explain if it is to explain everything is our morals and values. For this, we need to move into the area of the human sciences, such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Can these areas of study explain our morals and values? Iris Murdoch held that as moral beings we are immersed in a reality which transcends us. The expansive naturalist would not discount



Fiona Ellis

a metaphysical explanation of morals, but would also look for a naturalistic one.

A key question is that of free will. In Medieval society, and some societies today, how you behave is quite strictly controlled. As you grow up in a family and go to school, there are strict rules imposed many of which are based on a moral code. You can either adopt the code or rebel against it. Is it true you have exercised your free will if you rebel? It is not certain – there may be a reason for you to rebel, you may be unhappy and like causing mischief for instance. So, there could be psychological reasons for our behaviour which we are perhaps unaware of, rather than the simple exercise of our free will. The Delphic injunction ‘know thyself’ comes to mind: if you know your own psychology and character you are perhaps free (or more free) to exercise your free will. A further possibility is that there are unconscious reasons for our behaviour, and these can be discovered in psychoanalysis. All these ‘secret’ reasons for our behaviour seem a bit unnatural!

Another area is how do we as human beings fit into nature? Climate change is based on science, but people feel a deep connection with nature, we are not just observers of nature, we are part of it. Can you feel in your

bones the climate is changing?! Science on its own cannot capture the whole essence of life, that essence is not contained in a remote theoretical explanatory framework. Life is to be lived as well as studied.

There is perhaps in science a disengaged mentality which is not natural and can be inimical to life itself, and science and technology can cause harm because of it. We have to try to be clear about the purpose of any technology we introduce, we cannot ignore the moral and ethical consequences of technology. For example, social media needs to be regulated because of harmful bullying practices and behaviour which have been allowed to flourish within it for instance. This is partly because these messages are not natural in that they do not involve ‘face to face’ communication which is more natural.

Questions:

We can understand the universe, and our world, in terms of scientific laws. Why is this? Can we make any metaphysical claims from this ‘fact’? Why is science so successful? What are its limits?

If there was a ‘big bang’ at the creation of the universe, is this act of creation metaphysical?

Beyond Naturalism and Determinism

Notes of Wednesday Meeting on Naturalism Held on 18th March 2020

Due to the health warning against the Corona Virus, we decided to have our Wednesday meeting online. We are pleased that the meeting ran smoothly, and the technology did not let us down. We are grateful for technical help from Chris Seddon and Rob Zinkov.

PAUL COCKBURN & CHRIS SEDDON

We started by Paul Cockburn reading a short paper on naturalism (published in this issue). Then David Burrige presented a critique of metaphysics (see below). David emphasized the importance of empiricism, saying any theory had to be tested. Metaphysical theories cannot be tested and therefore should be rejected. Paul agreed with the importance of empiricism but noted that many theories which were proposed in the past, such as atomism, have only been proved empirically in recent times. There is a historical process, and perhaps we can use our intuition and imagination to form theories which will be empirically proved at some time in the future. We all have beliefs which are not testable – if someone tells you they have a supernatural experience such as a vision of an angel, say, we would have to make judgement in terms of whether to believe their statement or not. The empiricist claim is that such a judgement must ultimately be based on the evidence of our senses. Some thought that a supernatural claim might not be affected by such evidence, and it was also suggested that a metaphysical claim is an innate pre-requisite before we can even make sense of such evidence.

4 We discussed how what is natural differs from what is artificial. An artificial machine will have a purpose or purposes built into it by its creator, and in nature animals such as birds will build structures such as nests to raise their young. Some still believe that teleological purpose seems to be built into nature, however it was also argued that Darwinian evolution explained how the teleology of animal instincts and human creativity could have arisen through purely physical causes over the aeons, through the survival of certain genetic

mutations in a given environment, whereas in the case of the machine it is the agency of the creator which defines its purpose. The puzzle is that nature seems deterministic if we accept most forms of evolutionary theory.

It was argued however, that science is not in practice deterministic and that this is increasingly recognised by scientists, and moreover, that although it is not usually feasible to take a teleological explanation of any particular animal behaviour in terms of their inferred instincts or thoughts and reduce it directly to a causal explanation of the mechanisms of their brain, it is still important to recognise that such teleological phenomenon have ultimately arisen from purely physical causes, and not from some other supernatural or metaphysical realm.

In terms of human experience, we experience many things passively, but we also have agency. We do choose what to do, but there are many reasons for our behavior, such as unconscious factors and our emotional state. It was accepted that the ability of humans in particular to create mental abstractions seems far removed from a simple drive for evolutionary survival. This raised the question of the status of mathematics with regard to nature. Why, for example, are the laws of gravity so universal, and so mathematical? The simplest answer was that scientific laws are universal because that is what humans discover when they deliberately set out to find the most universal laws consistent with the evidence, and that they are so mathematical because mathematics comprises the most useful information-free concepts which humans create or discover, and whenever mathematics is not sufficient for science, it is expanded until it is. We were reminded though, that this creative process

**Chris Seddon
and Paul Cockburn**



is constrained very tightly by the requirements for consistency with the evidence in the case of science, and logical consistency in the case of mathematics and science.

Our knowledge is structured hierarchically. In the early 20th century it was common to think that physics was the ‘fundamental’ science, it could encompass everything from chemistry to biology to astronomy. In fact, there are ‘tiers’ of knowledge, building from atoms, to cells, to biology, to psychology, sociology etc. Can neuroscientific theories of the brain explain morals and ethics? It seems a tall order but this is a growing and productive field of study.

The argument that the ‘big bang’ at the origin of the universe could be a metaphysical event was discussed. What happened before the big bang? One view was that this latter question makes no sense, the same as asking ‘what is north of the north pole?’ There is a problem with testing theories about the ‘big bang’ empirically, although we do have the remnants of the big bang in terms of background radiation and the dark night sky. However, we can’t go back in time and see what actually happened! The same is true about evolution.

Someone made the distinction between strict Naturalism (which means only the laws of physics apply) and being informed by Natural Sciences. They suggested that the first view, which includes psychological laws, would result in a deterministic picture of the world and that the world would become predictable. They felt that the second view of being informed by science means that you can explain most phenomena by science but leave a room for values in ethics and aesthetics, as well as in human relationships and creativity. This second view is more like Paul’s (or Fiona Ellis’) ‘expansive naturalist’. Nietzsche’s Naturalism could be classified as Expansive Naturalism. Years

ago, there was a big debate between Leiter who insisted that Nietzsche was of the first view and others who saw Nietzsche as less deterministic than what Leiter made him to be. Others felt that it was possible to acknowledge the dependence of ‘tiers’ of knowledge such as psychology on ever more foundational tiers such as physics without believing that psychological explanations would ever be replaced by physical explanations in practice, that a greater degree of certainty in one tier would never undermine concepts such as free will, and that the most foundational tier was not in any case deterministic. See Chris Seddon’s short article below.

We were reminded that not every valid explanation leads to a simpler view. At one stage it seemed that sub-atomic physics would reduce a wide range of phenomena to just a few fundamental particles, but further investigation revealed the need for ever more fundamental particles. This gave rise to the question of whether we would ever find an ultimate tier of knowledge, or whether the foundation of the world was ‘turtles all the way down’. It was suggested that there might be certain fundamental principles which could be tested against evidence, but could not themselves be explained by any more general principles - so that in this sense science could be regarded as ‘magic that works’. The suggestion itself does not seem to be testable, and so might be regarded as metaphysical, rather than natural.

Overall, most of our discussion of naturalism was couched in terms of scientific debate, and ‘cause and effect’. The issues involved in culture, poetry, music, aesthetics etc., all of which are natural human activities, and add a layer of meaning to human life, did not figure much in our discussion, apart from acknowledging how predicting and understanding such complex behaviour represents an explosion of uncertainty.

Critique of Metaphysics

DAVID BURRIDGE



David Burridge

As a pragmatist I tend to think that Metaphysics is a philosophical delusion. What however I do think is that the foundations of knowledge are valuable to consider if we are to understand a particular school of philosophy. In pre-Kantian times Truth was to be viewed as contingent upon the basic foundation of God's will. Indeed, Descartes argued elegantly that our thinking will discover truth because it is the Creator's will that we do so.

If we proceed on a scientific basis to discover a truth independent of a creator, where do we go? There were of course Leibniz's spiritual Monads. There was a basic and separate route to everything. In his philosophy, Wolf founded his thinking on contingent truths and necessary truths. The creator provides a foundation and thereafter everything else can be worked out through empirical experience.

Kant woke up from his dogmatic slumbers by imposing a-priori knowledge on space, time and what he called categories. The mind constructs the world as we know it from our shared experience. The categories of quantity, quality, modality and relations are dimensions of the world we can experience. This enables scientists to get on with discovering the world as we can know it. He

accepted that there was a thing in itself, however he agreed we will never discover it. It is I think a useful theoretical principle to consider always that there is something deeper to discover than the immediacy of what we may sense, or what we have so far discovered. It drives our search for Truth onwards and upwards. We should consider what we have discovered, make sense of it as best we can and continue our journey. Metaphysics might sometimes help us stand back to consider concepts, but these only form a transitional process of thinking and like Kant's 'thing in itself' set us off to search for further empirical truths.

Metaphysics that produces so called truth independent of what can be empirically determined is incorrect. We don't need another label: Naturalism. We just get on with discovering as best we can.



Kant

On A Being Theory of Mind

(The original article by Peter Stibrany was published in The Wednesday issue 133)

Peter Stibrany's article postulated that we could have conscious states (linked to perception for example) that we are not aware of. The following comment from Kieran links this to 'locked-in' syndrome, and Peter's reply raises interesting larger identity issues.

KIERAN A. CARROLL

Peter wrote: 'Now, this would be a valid, logical positivist line to take if it were true that there was by definition no way to verify that phenomenal consciousness existed without access consciousness. Fortunately, this is not the case. It's entirely conceivable that neuroscience will reliably identify the neural correlates of consciousness, and then be able to assess whether this consciousness was taking place somewhere in the brain of a subject even though the subject was unaware of it.'

Entirely conceivable indeed, but of course at the moment hypothetical.

A good place to explore hypothetical ideas is science fiction. Here's an idea for an SF philosophy story based on that idea: what if there were to be a conscious process 'running' in a person's brain, which had access to the brain's sensory inputs (sight, hearing, etc.), perhaps also to *other* conscious processes in the brain, but which *didn't have access to the actuators which are used for communication to the outside world* (voice to speak, control of hands for writing,...). Also, which wasn't able to pass messages to any other conscious processes inside the brain. This would then definitely not be *access consciousness*, as currently defined, because (if I'm understanding it correctly) that involves the consciousness having access to communicating with the outside world *through the body's built-in capabilities*. This

would be like Locked-In Syndrome (which is a real and tragic medical condition), but even more so. From https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Locked-in_syndrome, 'Those with locked-in syndrome may be able to communicate with others through coded messages by blinking or moving their eyes, which are often not affected by the paralysis'.

Now, what if clever neuroscientists developed some means of detecting the existence of that process, as Peter conjectures? Say, using some evolved version of MRI? Let's take that a step further and assume that they go beyond *detecting its existence*, and develop some means of *measuring some its internal states*. Say, in the way that and EEG can quantitatively measure *something* about the brain's internal states.

Even if that measurement is very crude, the internal conscious process could use it to communicate to those neuroscientists, through the medium of the external detector equipment. E.g., even if that equipment could only detect a binary on/off signal, the internal process could start communicating through some form of a digital code — in much the same way that *real* Locked-In Syndrome patients communicate using only eye-blinks.

Who knows what such a previously-locked-in consciousness might have to 'say' to others in the outside world, when finally being given a 'voice'? Might it be simply be rather



Locked-In Syndrome patient

like our ‘ordinary’ consciousness, and have nothing all that interesting to say (other than ‘Finally! Thank God! I’ve been going crazy in here!)? Or might it be somehow *different* from ordinary consciousness, and have something really interesting to say (perhaps something that’d make for a really neat plot twist ... hmm, story-telling wheels are starting to turn...)

Of course, this is currently just a gedankenexperiment (thought experiment), triggered by Peter’s musings. To make it a good SF story it’d need other things, like a plot, characters, etc. But on a more serious note

— I see from the Locked-In Syndrome wiki page that there is such a thing a *Total Locked-In Syndrome*, for people who have lost even the ability to blink their eyes. (Amazingly, it seems that some people have *volunteered* to experience this state temporarily, via curare injections! With apparently ‘no evidence of altered state of consciousness,’ to Peter’s point that ‘states of consciousness’ can already be somewhat detected by external means). Hmm, perhaps my above concept could be developed by someone into external equipment to help ‘unlock’ those poor souls who suffer from TLIS...



Peter Stibrany’s Reply:

Kieran makes some interesting points relating consciousness to locked-in syndrome. I’d like to use this to highlight a different issue for scientists looking at correlates of consciousness, starting with an example.

Let’s say we are looking at a car engine, to see how it works. If we look at it in a reductive way (i.e. identify components and see how they interact to create an operating engine), we find that there is no single component of the engine that is itself an engine. The engine is made up of things that are not engines, in other words.

So, with locked-in syndrome, there is in some sense an entire inner personality (or conscious being) pursuing an inner monologue, and the issue is that this monologue cannot be shared with the outside world. That is a

tragic situation indeed. But, if we look at the constituents that make up this personality, we have to accept that none of these constituents is itself a personality. This is where I see the role of phenomenal consciousness.

Phenomenal consciousness is experience, but it is not knotted up in the way it needs to be to be proper (or access) consciousness. It is like a perception without a perceiver, or rather, perception and perceiver bound up together. But it is not a personality.

You might well ask why it’s interesting to think there may be inaccessible or unreportable bits of experience wandering around in our brains. The answer, going back to the engine analogy, is that to understand the engine, you need to know about parts like timing chains. You can’t just ask ‘what part of the engine is the actual engine?’

Art and Poetry

Secrets of Love in Idleness

*.... milk-white, now purple with love's wound,
And maidens call it love-in-idleness...
(A Midsummer Night's Dream)*

Infinitive

Summer is over.
The milk-white flowers have turned purple.
Autumn storms loom. I watch the squirrels,
try to be like them:
to gather, hide, to gather, hide,
as darker hours surely will arrive.

Failing to move, idly we sit
waiting for the hours to go,
and flow into each other. Decades
do not make any difference to a life
that passes with the seasons.
Unlimited
the space between my upper thighs,
unaccounted for,
my thoughts from day to night to day.

Imperative

I feel I have a duty
for a life given without merit, urgently
I try to influence, find a ledge on which to lay my spirit level.
I place it where you do not work, outside.
You pile your own logs, work on your own wreckage.

Indicative

Could anything be more indicative of your melancholy
than how you wear your body, how you hold
your head to one side, fold your arms tightly
when you speak to me
or let me wait for answers
that never come.
You sit for hours in the dark, staring ahead,
and do not use your hands with tasks, polishing silver,
filing your nails or leafing through a magazine or book.
Horizons merge with skies for you,
I crawl on hands and knees to reach.



Subjunctive

You go through life, as a blind man explores
a disused mine shaft, groping for ways out
and hanging on to endless ropes of the subjunctive.
You should let go, see me in moonlight for a revelation
or in the true morning light,
I rack my heart for clues
to hold you tight

Conditional

You do not have much self-esteem. It is a sickness,
for it is conditional. Your marriage is dependent
on avoiding things, you don't forgive.
You do not lie. You are not changing with the weather
and your inner self does not blow in the wind.
I take your hand to shuffle and to deal, shuffle and deal.
I split the deck. You never teach me tricks
nor do you show the joker.

Summer is over, autumn storms are looming,
I gather my white face, hide the dark secret
in my lap.

Poem and Artwork by Scharlie Meeuws

Dream-Catchers



CHRIS NORRIS

Between ‘there came to me in a dream’ (*es träumte mir*) and ‘I dreamt’ lie the ages of the world. But which is the more true? No more than it is spirits who send the dream, is it the ego that dreams.’

Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Monograms’, in *Minima Moralia*

We say ‘I dreamt . . .’, and then devise some way
To cast that ‘I’ conjointly in the role
Of teller, witness, chorus, addressee,
Omniscient narrator, clueless guy
Like Holmes’s Watson, lead-part in the play
Or bit-part, kicker of the winning goal
Or fumbling goalie: blissed-out reverie
Or stressed-out cursing as the ball goes by.

No dream but had some message to convey,
The Ancients thought, some import that the soul
Might dwell upon, though messages could be
Truth-bearing or deceptive, sent to try
Our powers of divination or betray
Our vices, frailties, lack of self-control,
Or how the Gates of Horn and Ivory
Left folk in doubt what dreams should signify.

That’s how they thought of dreams back in the day,
As missives sent by gods or fate to bowl
Them out with jump-cuts to futurity,
Dream-catchers in reverse that caught the eye
Of inward sense and conjured things that they,
Day-exiles let out strictly on parole,
Found enigmatic since they lacked the key
That only night-side *émigrés* supply.



Adorno



Shelley

Yet face it: we're no better placed to pay
The piper, we whose efforts to cajole
Some favourite Freudian tune confess that he,
The analyst, has twigged our alibi,
Latched on as our internal *émigré*,
And shown our minds, like Shelley's fading coal,
Agleam beneath the daytime thought-debris
In Id's domain where Ego fears to pry.

Both wrong, both ghosts we dreamers need to lay,
Those tales of gods and oracles that troll
Our night-thoughts still, and that apostasy,
That flight from Freud's best insights, that would tie
Our psychic health to signs that all's OK
With us and ours, that ego's now made whole,
And lucid dream-worlds leave their heroes free
To make 'get on in life!' their do-or-die.

For still they prowl, those demons held at bay,
Disrupt our narratives, extract their toll,
And faze us with the nightly syncope
Induced when 'it dreamt me' sends thought awry
Yet has us not forget that, when we say
'I dreamt . . .', we're vainly setting up as sole
Authorities or rulers by decree
Where each peripety gives that the lie.

Will Machines Become Kantians?

This a response to the debate on Ethics in Automation in the previous issue of *The Wednesday*.

DAVID CLOUGH

Are there not many multiple images of the emancipation of the machine? One striking one is that if man evolved then machines must evolve too. There's carbon life and there's silicon life.

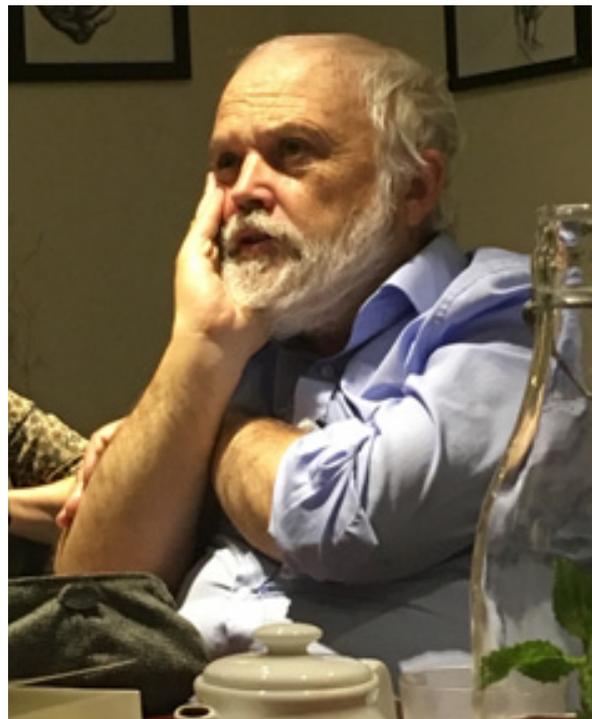
Here is an alternative text starting from the opening idea. I am not really dealing with another point about satisfied labour or craft. I understand the point about racist CCTV facial recognition and again I wonder if this is the only kind of critique, but I'll leave it.

The opening idea is that we fear a machine revolt because it includes a fanciful discussion of revolt in the spirit of worker-led revolutions. But this lens is less helpful when the robots stop being allegory. (It is in fact a drone targeting me!)

Why do we treat machines like animals? - the drone, says, before killing me? Sending them into dangerous risky environments instead of us. You used to go down mines and sewers. Now you send us. Why are we fighting your wars? But then 'he' carries out his instructions (based on our fear). Is a doctor just an information machine? In that case a robot will do. Is a priest or a psychiatrist an information machine? What are the differences here? Are there any?

We, in many ways, are turning ourselves into machines. We like techno-sounding expressions like we're 'running on empty'. Christians talk today of man going back to 'default settings': Manufacturer's instructions. But the Promethean enlightenment idea is not just about class war it is about transcending the programmer. Isn't it? As a theist I still find myself unfashionably stretched between these two positions. If there is a heaven it must be more than Eden. Hence Greek Neoplatonism has a point. But I suppose that gets into arguments about a Fall.

Would a machine learn to become religious in its own terms? At what point might the dominance of utilitarian logic (the easiest way to calculate 'big



David Clough

data') be challengeable? Are there already hierarchical commands that interfere? What are they? Does anyone know? What about algorithms? Still utilitarian?

We wish to say that we are an increasingly irenic and peace-loving society. But computer games and war movies suggest we enjoy watching violence from a distance. Outsourced to technology the enlightened machine must make its own judgments - but not by reading Kant! Not at the moment at least.

In Habermasian terms what are the 'machine's' interests. This probably still sounds like Sci-fi. If we could only depersonalise anthropocentric thought. Would we be back with an unintelligent machine? Are there not more multiple images of the emancipation of the machine?

Comment

Comment On Corona Virus The Simple Always Overlooked

MIKE ENGLAND



Mike England

The present worry about Coronavirus is an interesting scenario as it presents a direct question to each and every one of us. We have to take into account the information about the corona virus we can absorb from the media. But we all know the media is mistrusted these days along with politicians. The media can be manipulated to show a particular perspective, and there is also the possibility of fake news. Where does it leave us mere mortals? Well, confused as to what to do!

With our common sense being questioned/undermined and legislated about, we doubt our ability to make the so called 'right decision' and so rely on those that appear to be sure (i.e. the nanny state) ... mmm? It is an interesting conundrum!

Decision 1: turn right. Think only of me (I) and panic (fear based). Decision 2: turn left. Think of the community (we) and use common sense and don't let fear make a decision for us.

Panic buying can be seen as a selfish act as it shows that you only care about yourself and not about others. But if we don't panic, it can be seen as stupid, as it shows a lack of self-preservation which is the base motive of the 'dog eat dog' situation, as it is the case in nature - and we come from nature, physically anyhow. Again, this divided thinking only highlights the duality in our personalities. This is why I always think the obvious is so easily overlooked. We as a species are extremely clever but also extremely blind. And although most people are happy not to think and happy to follow, it is up to us to establish what sort of system we want that is good for all human beings: regardless of colour, culture... etc.

It seems to me that human beings are easily led (or misled).

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Self Isolation



I thought of myself as a bundle of duties and feelings:
things expected, corners turned, edges marked.
But now it's all to be locked out, slammed in.

I was a social perpetration with a clutch of strivings,
always nodded forward by the friendly crowd but
having a duty of care towards them to consider.

Now I must dig in my own dishevelled dark.
No touching tender hooks, nor consulting;
just fiddling with my *id*, or reasoning with my *ego*.
All alone, how can I cope with an ending,
in such an empty space.

David Burridge