

The *Wednesday*

www.thewednesdayoxford.com

Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford



Editorial

A Busy Time for Philosophy

The pandemic has introduced a new reality to our way of learning. It may be virtual in the technical sense but it is real and it is here to stay. It is the communication of ideas through the internet on an unprecedented scale. I have been receiving e-mails about open lectures, conferences and courses from all over the world. We also run our Wednesday meetings via Zoom and this enabled us to invite speakers from outside Oxford and to benefit from their knowledge.

I find myself busy more and more with Zoom. Right now, I have booked myself on several courses, one of which is in Melbourne, Australia. This is also the experience of a lot of people I know or have contacted. We seem to be all absorbed into a virtual space and exchanging ideas through it. But to put it in philosophical terms, this is either, negatively, the Brain in the Vat thought experiment becoming a reality, that we are led externally by clever scientists to believe, or, positively, as the idea of the active intellect of Aristotle and Averroes becoming true, that we are all connected to one virtual intellect. That is to say that when we philosophise, we join together to form an active intellect, via Zoom, regardless of time and place. If the first hypothesis is negative and sceptical, the second is positive and interesting. It means we can harness all thought into one intellect, not as a static intellect but one that is developing and advancing.

Is this progress in philosophy in the way science understands it? It may be, but not in the sense of solving problems and forgetting about them. It is an elucidation of problems, bringing more perspectives to bear on them, presenting them in a more relevant and interesting way. It is a move towards understanding and explaining problems that we encounter in philosophy. They might get

resolved or it may take more time. But in either case the problems might not go away but, as in science, may resurface again and need to be rethought.

However, philosophy via Zoom has one more advantage over science. It doesn't need the costly business of equipment to do experiments and the laboratories to conduct them in. All you need to follow philosophy through Zoom is your computer and the ability to connect via the internet. Even the problem of obtaining books and academic papers has been made easy through the internet. This means that philosophy is more accessible nowadays through Zoom and you can benefit from the available resources to carry on your education for the rest of your life. But of course, to enter the work place and obtain a job, you still have to acquire a degree from an established institution. That is why this opportunity for education appeals more to retired people or researchers who want to expand or deepen their knowledge of a certain topic.

One last advantage that I will mention here is that this more democratic way of exchanging ideas, particularly in philosophy, allows different traditions of reading or thinking in philosophy to be listened to and benefited from. It is no longer restricted to one way of seeing the world but allows a multiplicity of methods and worldviews. Technology has come under fire from different philosophical perspectives but it has been shown that science could ally itself with knowledge generally and philosophy in particular, and help philosophy expand and flourish. Human beings are inventive and creative and such creativity in a diversity of fields will hopefully lead to a better future.

Causation and Free Will

Philosophical thought about mental versus physical causes has historically led to an unexplained metaphysical dichotomy between the mental world and the physical world. I argue that on examining more closely the concepts of causation and intentional action this dichotomy becomes a fairly simple distinction rather than an ontological puzzle.

This is the second part of the text of a talk presented to the Wednesday meeting on the 2nd August 2020. The first part was published last month in issue 146.

CHRIS SEDDON

Part 2

Causation and Free Will

Treating the *specific cause*, *specific effect*, *relevant correlation*, *general cause* and *general effect* as parameters means that causation is a purely logical concept which has contingent applications through the selection of contingent correlations, causes and effects. In particular there is no reason why the general and / or specific causes should not be mental events and the general and / or specific effects should not be physical events or vice versa.

A distinction between mental and physical events is not necessary to account for the phenomenon of free will and does not help do so. My actions are in line with my free will not to the extent that they are uncaused, but to the extent to which they are determined by my beliefs and desires:

That an *action* is an **intentional action** of a *person* means that:

- the *action* is the result of the *person's* belief that certain situations exist, and their desire that certain other situations exist

This definition clearly appeals to some unspecified type of causal correlation between the person's beliefs and desires, and their

actions. Determining a person's beliefs and intentions may be a result of observing their actions over a period of time, together with some assumptions based on other experience including the history and evolution of the person. Thus, determining whether an action is intentional rests on relevant general causes, effects, and correlations:

That a *specific action* is an **intentional action** of a *person* relative to a *relevant correlation*, *general beliefs* and *desires* and *general actions* means that:

- the person has some specific beliefs and desires which cause the *specific action* in terms of the *relevant correlation*, the *general beliefs* and *desires*, and the *general actions*

Since actions can be more or less intentional, a more flexible concept of intentional action will take this into account, using further implied parameters to suggest that the intentions are more or less important in explaining the actions:

That a *specific action* is a **more intentional action** of a *person* relative to a *relevant correlation*, *general beliefs*, *general desires* and *general actions* than an *other specific action* of an *other person* relative to an *other relevant correlation*, *other general beliefs*,



Giving blood under duress

other general desires and *other general actions* relative to a *method of comparing correlations* means that:

- the *specific action* is an intentional action of the *person* relative to the *relevant correlation*, *general beliefs* and *desires*, and *general actions*, and
- the *other specific action* is an intentional action of the *other person* relative to the *other relevant correlation*, *other general beliefs* and *desires*, and *other general actions*, and
- the *relevant correlation* between the *general desires* and the *general actions* is closer according to the *method of comparing correlations* than the *other relevant correlation* between the *other general desires* and the *other general actions*

As with the other implied parameters, the method of comparing correlations will vary depending on the context, and may be more or less intuitive. For example, in the movie *Little Miss Marker*, Big Steve only agrees to

donate blood at gun-point, whereas the other gangsters come forward to donate blood out of love for Marky. In one sense Steve gives blood voluntarily because he believes that he will be shot if he doesn't and he desires to stay alive, but in another sense his action is deemed less intentional than theirs because at first he only does it because they threaten him. So, in comparing this to other situations, we deem that their actions are correlated with their love for Marky, but his actions are correlated with both his desire for survival and their love for Marky. Therefore, the correlation between their actions and their desires is closer than the correlation between his actions and his desires - since his actions also depend on their desires. Of course if they knock him out and take his blood while he is unconscious his action in giving blood will not be intentional at all, since his beliefs and desires will not be correlated with the action of giving blood by any stretch of the imagination.

Mental Versus Physical Events

Our assessment of intentional actions is based on assumptions about a person's



Attributing beliefs and desires to other people

beliefs and desires, which in turn are based on a combination of interdependent factors including their observed actions, past experiences, and genesis. Beliefs and desires are, like emotions, abstract concepts we construct to explain physical actions. They play a significant role in explaining the actions of complex organisms such as humans, but also a significant though arguably less complex role in explaining the actions of other animals.

Since some of our beliefs, desires, and emotions are acquired and some are instinctive, it is tempting to extend the concepts beyond their usual role to apply to the innate desires and behaviour even of non-animal forms of life - in the sense, for example, that a species of flower is designed to close its petals at night because in an evolutionary sense it wants to survive long enough to be pollinated and it 'believes' that pollinators will not be so active as herbivores at night. Of course we do not need to posit such a 'belief' of any individual flower to explain that behaviour, but the environmental factors behind that evolved trait plays the same role in explaining the actions of the species as the experience of a conscious animal plays in explaining the actions of the individual.

I stretched the concept of belief and desire - perhaps beyond breaking point - merely to illustrate that there is a continuum between physical and mental events, based on the complexity and nature of the correlation between beliefs and desires, and actions.

This does not mean that mental events can be reduced to physical events. When I attribute beliefs and desires to an organism, I am not concerned with the electrical impulses in their brains, I am concerned with correlating observed actions, past experiences, and the genesis - or evolution - of the organism. I neither know nor normally care how their brain physically operates. I accept that something chemical, electrical - maybe even quantum mechanical - is going on in their brain, but that is not what I am talking about when I am talking about beliefs and desires. Even if it turned out that their brain worked with entirely different physical processes than I supposed, or from everyone else, my attribution of beliefs and desires would still be based on observed actions, experiences and genesis.

Conclusions

Causation is any *appropriate correlation* between *generalised causes* and *effects*, which are not usually stated explicitly but are merely implied by the context of the causal claim.

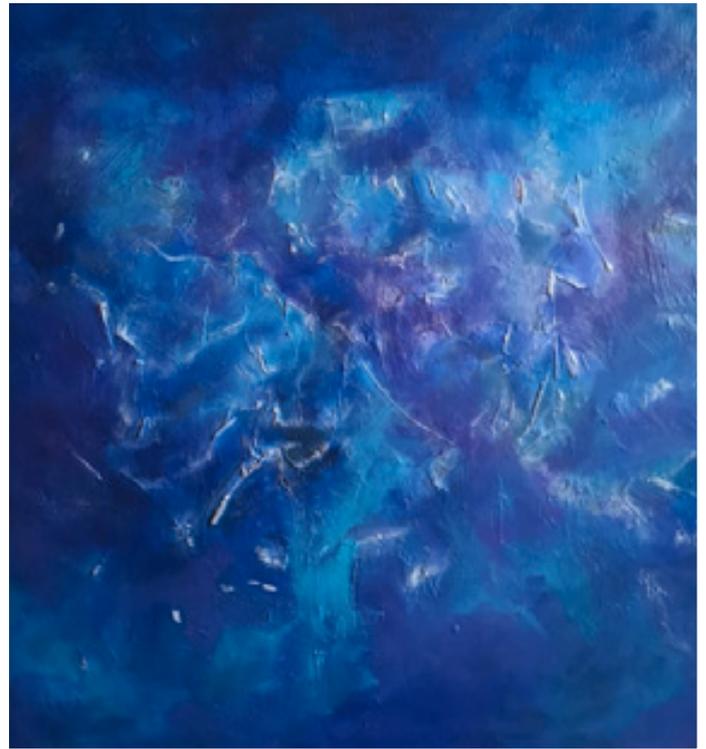
Intentional action is any *action* correlated with *beliefs* and *desires* inferred from other actions, past experience, and evolutionary history.

Such mental states have physical causes, but mental events cannot typically be reduced to physical events because the actual physical cause is typically irrelevant to the mental claim.

A Touch of Blue

DR. ALAN XUEREB

'A Touch of Blue'
(100 cms x 100 cms)
mixed media on canvas (2020)



I turned 50 on the 10th of February 2020, just before Covid-19 became a real pandemic. Needless to say that my wife Silke wanted a theme for my birthday party, and I chose to have it my way, it was my birthday after all, I had the privilege to decide. I chose a very simple theme revolving around my favourite colour: Blue. This appears to be a very childish choice. Some friends and family suggested a more elaborate theme such as 'Venetian carnival' since my birthday coincides with the carnival period (don't forget I'm a Maltese national who lives in Germany). Truth is, I love simplicity.

However, my love of this colour has deep connotations, ranging from philosophical to political. Blue is a primary colour that is generously used in marketing. Over and above this, blue is predominant in nature in the sense that the sky and the sea *appear* blue – and both give us that sense of tranquillity we yearn for. However, blue is also usually associated with centre-right or conservative parties, originating from its use by the Tories (the predecessors of the Conservative Party) in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, blue has a philosophical function

or more precisely a thinking function. One may here recall another Maltese national, the father of lateral thinking Edward de Bono. Symbolically, de Bono uses colours to create a thought process. It is in this 'thinking-hat' system that blue also has an important meaning, coherent with what has been said above about blue in relation to tranquillity. De Bono's 'thinking-hat' strategy stipulates that a blue hat should always be used both at the beginning and at the end of a discussion. In politics, business and even in voluntary work, the blue hat is used to discuss how the meeting will be conducted and to develop the goals and objectives.

So, you see whilst my choice of a colour theme for my 50th birthday was perhaps triggered by a choice rooted in emotion, the implications of that choice are all-pervading. After all, as the great Bertrand Russell would put it, as soon as we begin to philosophise, we find that even the most everyday things lead to a whole new world of issues and possibilities. My philosophy about the colour blue is summed up in this mixed media painting, inspired by the homonym used for my 50th birthday party: *A Touch of Blue*.

Follow Up

The Enlightenment Revisited

Reports of the Wednesday Meetings Held During September

Notes of Wednesday Meeting Held on 2nd September

Written by RAHIM HASSAN

The Enlightenment has been the topic of many new books and articles. The interest in the Enlightenment may be a reaction to a new reality in the world of politics and religion. The rise of relativism, of identity politics, and religious revivalism in many traditions, plus the attack on the ‘modernity’ project and rationality has called for a rediscovery of the values of the Enlightenment. Jane O’Grady was invited to give a talk to the Wednesday group about the Enlightenment. She has recently published a concise book with the title *Enlightenment Philosophy in a Nutshell* (2019).

Jane said that by the Enlightenment she does not mean getting enlightened in general but a particular movement in a particular time. It dates from Descartes’ time (17th century) and lasts for a couple of centuries, possibly until 1801/2 with disappointment in the French Revolution after the reign of terror. What is the Enlightenment? It relates to the dark time of the previous era when the great power of the church held sway particularly, but not limited to, the Catholic Church. The Enlightenment pledged to free the mind from religion through skepticism and atheism. There were two strands of the Enlightenment: a radical and a moderate one. However, the emphasis on a strict rationality generated a reaction in the form of Romanticism and other individual reactions by different philosophers. We can think of Kant as a middle ground, and the name of the Enlightenment as *Aufklärung* belongs to him. The late philosopher Roger Scruton described the Enlightenment as ‘a form of light pollution, which prevents us from seeing the stars.’ Weber called the result of the Enlightenment a ‘disenchantment’, the world became less mysterious and perhaps less attractive. Critical Theory philosophers described the Enlightenment’s rationality as ‘instrumental reason’.

The universality of reason that the Enlightenment



Jane O’Grady

believed in has generated recently a strong relativistic reaction which is known now as ‘identity politics’. The universality of the Enlightenment is read through the history of the West and interpreted as colonial, sexist and Eurocentric. Instead of this universality, the call now is for diversity and plurality. Supporters of the Enlightenment, or those who align themselves with it, think positively of the colonial period and the contribution of the West to the rest of the world. I think the speaker took this line of thought. But the speaker also said that without the Enlightenment there wouldn’t be identity politics and that the Enlightenment period saw an increased awareness and meeting with the non-European. In defence of universality, Jane said that with cultural relativism there is a devaluing of truth and a loss of certainty and objectivity.

Following the talk there was a long debate. One topic was whether there are other forms of knowledge besides rational knowledge. The absence of the imagination and emotion from the Enlightenment were also noted. Perhaps we need to balance the rational with the imaginative and the emotional.

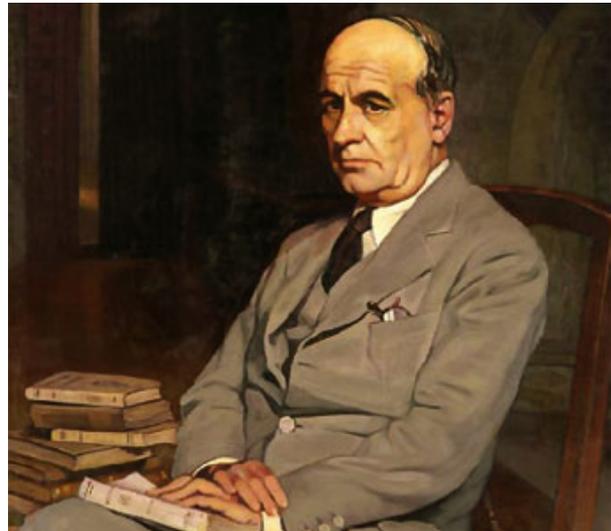
Ortega y Gasset and the Nature of Philosophy

Notes of Wednesday Meeting Held on 9th September

What is Philosophy? is a question that has been asked frequently. It is interesting that this question was raised by the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955). Edward Greenwood presented to the group a paper on 'The nature of philosophy with particular reference to Nietzsche and Ortega y Gasset'. The works of many other philosophers were mentioned and discussed.

It was Kant who first pointed out that if philosophy was a branch of knowledge with a distinct subject matter like mathematics or physics, it would have made progress by making new substantive discoveries which overturned previous views. However, this has not been the case. Edward dwelt a lot on the difference between science and philosophy. But his main topic was Ortega y Gasset's book *What is Philosophy?* This book was published in 1960 five years after Ortega's death in 1955, but it started out as a series of lectures given at the University of Madrid as early as 1929. It turned out that there are many connections between Ortega's writing in this book and his other books, such as *Man and Society*, and Nietzsche's books. Edward pointed out that both of them see the philosopher as a cultural critic.

Ortega left Spain for Germany at the beginning of the 20th century (1905) to join a number of German universities in Leipzig, Berlin and Marburg, the centres of neo-Kantian studies at the time. Ortega made an intensive study of German philosophy but was critical of the German universities, particularly Marburg neo-Kantianism, for being an epigone philosophy. As Edward put it: 'It lacks real vitalism because it deals with problems second hand rather than with a novel approach. It is backward looking whereas for Ortega human beings are essentially forward looking, future orientated with projects. He also criticized Hegel and Marx for putting collectivity, or the state or the community, before the individual.'



Ortega y Gasset

In *What Is Philosophy?* Ortega takes philosophy to be an endless process. To be a philosopher is not to be a commentator on others, it is to philosophize. Edward said that for Ortega the object of philosophy is human life and not science. The natural sciences cannot give us a morality. Both Nietzsche and Ortega would agree with Collingwood's remark that: 'It is in the world of history, not in the world of nature that man finds the central problems he has to solve.' Greatly influenced as he was by Dilthey, Ortega wrote two books on history: *History as a System* (1935) and *Historical Reason* (1984).

We spent some time discussing philosophy and time. One view is that we don't need history as we think in the here and now. Husserl was of this opinion. But Derrida criticized him precisely on this point. The other view is that history is essential to philosophy. A separate point was made about progress in philosophy and science. It was observed that philosophy has advanced not only in ethical matters but also in Logic. But it was also acknowledged that philosophy is not just arguments, it can learn from poetry and consequently this will mean the emotions are included in the range of philosophical discussions.

‘A Roll Of The Dice Will Never Abolish Chance’

Notes of Wednesday Meeting Held on 16th September

David Clough volunteered to talk to the group on the life, work and influence of the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé (18 March 1842 – 9 September 1898). Mallarmé was a major French symbolist poet and critic, and a major influence on several artistic schools of the early 20th century, such as Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism, and Surrealism.

David situated Mallarmé within late 19th century nihilism and decadence and he suggested that Mallarmé was a nihilist although he may have changed his views towards the end of his life.

Mallarmé worked as an English teacher and spent much of his life in relative poverty but was famed for his salons, gatherings of intellectuals at his house. The group became known as *les Mardistes*, because they met on Tuesdays. Through this group, Mallarmé exerted considerable influence on the work of a generation of writers, French and non-French.

Mallarmé’s earlier work was influenced by Charles Baudelaire. But his later work anticipated the fusions between poetry and the other arts that were to blossom in the next century. Most of the later work

explored the relationship between content and form, between the text and the arrangement of words and spaces on the page, as in his last major poem, ‘A roll of the dice will never abolish chance’ of 1897. After World War Two there was a revival of his poetry in France and great interest from composers. Man Ray’s film, *Les Mystères du Château de Dé* (*The Mystery of the Chateau of Dice*) (1929), was greatly influenced by Mallarmé’s work, prominently featuring the line ‘A roll of the dice will never abolish chance’. Mallarmé was also extensively referred to in Huysmans’ novel *À Rebours*. David talked about Mallarmé’s influence on American poets (of whom some were living in London). He also tried to show that Mallarmé’s poetry and writings were present in the thought of Badiou, Foucault, Deleuze and Lacan, especially the idea of the ‘roll of the dice.’ David also read a number of Mallarmé’s poems, especially ‘A roll of the dice’. This poem has been commented on by several philosophers, including Deleuze.

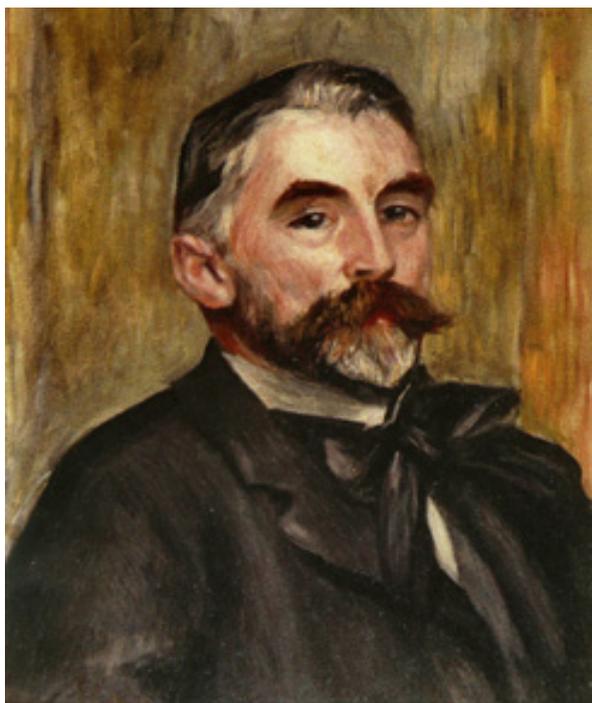
In his elegy to Wagner, who had died in 1883, Mallarmé acknowledged that Wagner had succeeded where he had failed, and that he would not be able to express the ideas in his mind and they would never see the light of day:

The funereal silence of a shroud is already beginning
To spread its folds over the contents of my mind.

More than a century after writing these lines, Mallarmé’s poems found a new lease of life and a remarkable fame.

There was a focus in the discussion on Badiou and his philosophy of the ‘event’. Badiou also grounded his philosophy in mathematics, and presented a theory of events in science, philosophy and politics showing that there were periods full of puzzling contradictions and aporias. Then an event comes and resolves these previous contradictions.

An objection was also raised that Mallarmé was wrong in his poetic style of leaving the order of the poem to chance. It was suggested that formal poetry with its rhyming, and necessary constraints, leads to freedom. From this perspective, a view was expressed that Mallarmé’s famous poem was a mistake and a still-born entity.



Mallarmé

Being and the Absence of Emergency

*Notes of Wednesday Meeting
Held on 23rd September*



Santiago Zabala

We were pleased to have invited the philosopher Santiago Zabala to join us from Spain to talk about his latest book *Being at Large: Freedom in the Age of Alternative Facts* and his other philosophical concerns. He is a philosopher, cultural and political critic, an academic and a prolific writer. His books and articles have a political interest and they all engage with the current situation in terms of the world of culture, philosophy and politics.

His main concern in this talk is the question of being, or more precisely ‘the remains of being’ after the destruction of metaphysics. His approach is hermeneutical, following Heidegger and the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo. Hermeneutics is not a closed system but an open interpretation, continuous and developing. In this sense, hermeneutic studies have an anarchistic element built into them because interpretation like translation has a subjective point of view. Santiago mentioned Luther who did that in his interpretation of the Bible and so did Schleiermacher. The question of interpretation does not only concern the text but the interpreter as well. Marx in his eleventh thesis on Feuerbach said the question is not one of interpretation but of changing the world, although this does not contradict the fact that we need to understand the world to be able to change it.

To discuss being is to discuss ‘remains’ without falling back into metaphysics. Why is this important? Because talking about being is talking about reality. Interpreting reality is open-ended, indeterminate and not a closed conclusion. This is the meaning of ‘being at large’. It is a free and developing interpretation in direct touch with

reality. But is it possible to achieve such freedom and ‘being at large’? The answer seems to be negative because of the insistence in philosophy and politics on reality and normal order.

Analytical philosophers came under fire in the talk for being followers of a scientific mode of thinking, together with an insistence on facts. Interpretations were left behind. But Santiago argued that facts don’t stand on their own but need a body of interpretations and institutions (or what he called ‘filters’) to make sense. This state of affairs has led to popular politics and the move towards the right in politics and an indifference to change. This is illustrated by what Santiago calls the ‘absence of emergency’ or, following Heidegger’s *Notlosigkeit*, a ‘lack of a sense of plight’, or a ‘lack of distress’. Take the present pandemic emergency. There is a sense of life going back to normal but there are many aspects of life and practices that have to change if the lesson of the pandemic is to be learnt. This also applies to climate change and also political crises. As he put it: ‘the greatest emergency has become the absence of emergency’. But the task of philosophy is to interpret and change the way we see and think. Understanding the world, in his opinion, calls for ‘an existential stand’, by caring and being responsible for the present and the future.

During the discussion, there was a strong defence of analytical philosophy against hermeneutics and the insistence on facts and reality. Hermeneutics was also accused of being dogmatic. Perhaps the debate was another example of the disagreement between continental and analytical trends of philosophy.

Objectivity and its Limits

Notes of Wednesday Meeting Held on 30th September

Peter Gibson defended the idea of 'objectivity' in this meeting. Objectivity may seem obvious but it is more complex than one thinks. This has been a problem ignored for a long time.

Peter said from the start that he is a naïve realist. He takes for granted the existence of the external world. He believes also in 'facts' independent of thought, and defined 'truth' as successful thought about facts.

Objectivity shows up in our everyday talk and admits of degrees. For example, we speak of being 'a bit more objective' about something. That is to say that there is still a subjective element in this judgement. It is from a certain perspective. But it may gain more objectivity by involving other points of view. However, objectivity in the strong sense aims at grasping the truth. Hence, he defined objectivity as: 'A judgement is objective

if it eliminates subjective influences sufficiently to approach an accurate grasp of facts.'

To talk about facts, is to talk about perception. Increased objectivity can be achieved by employing more than one of our senses to observe a fact, seeing, touching and so on. But even then observation does not guarantee truth, since the sun is observed to 'move' across the sky. Observation needs corrections from reason. The correction in studying the movement of the sun may need some study of astronomy. Peter also discussed the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. The primary qualities (size, shape, mass, motion, solidity, number) are mind independent and seem to be secure and agreed on but the status of secondary qualities is questionable because they are mind dependent.

One way of increasing objectivity is to seek many perspectives, with varied viewpoints and preconceptions. But even this strategy is not secure since other viewpoints may merely reinforce prejudices and errors. However, there are areas of life where we can't use instruments, say in legal matters. Here, the law has to be as accurate as possible to fit the cases it is dealing with and well written to avoid ambiguities. Peter suggested that 'we can only start from the obvious, and work outwards'.

There is also an evolutionary aspect to objectivity. A society that doesn't care about facts or follows a wrong conception of fact will perish. He believed that 'the highest objectivity is achieved by the consensus of a large group of thoughtful and knowledgeable individuals'. He also thought that objectivity about 'values' is possible. He argued that: 'If the ends of human life are agreed, and values derive from these ends, then objectivity about values is possible.' He saw a role for the experts and institutions in attending to objectivity. However, after considering a number of aspects of the question of objectivity, Peter concluded that there is no perfect objectivity but there is an insistence on facts and the aiming for truth.



Peter Gibson

Art and Poetry

When I Am Sad



When I am sad, I create star systems in my darkness.
I plug the stars from the sky and carefully build constellations:
the charger's stand-by bulb, a starry computer screen,
strategically placed fairy lights, the turquoise glow of my aquarium...

Then slowly, the darkness lifts and brightens up my soul.
I use my radio to tune them in, sprinkle Cassiopeia, the Polar Star
and Orion over the coffee table. I light candles into solar systems.
A fragile Scorpio flickers around shelves.

A Canis Major of Turkish lamps creates patterns over the wall.
The moon beams behind the curtains seem to approve,
lending authenticity. I scatter tealights for planets
on top and around the bookshelves...

Poems and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Art and Poetry

Thicker Than Water

Moving house, packing things from the loft
I find a picture, wood-framed, snug
beneath the dust of years.

Under the light and polished glass
pencil-drawn turrets are freed, stone walls rise,
the low angled view of a church spire
next to a castle, where tiny ant-like people walk,
women and children in bonnets and a man
constrained with stick and top hat
is crossing the moat's footbridge.

I read the spiky letters on the back,
my grandmother's half-forgotten script:
*your ancestors moving into their new home
in eighteen hundred and fifteen. Drawn by them.*
She always wanted me to know about her blood
thicker than water and the past
she carefully spread out in diaries
for me, her only grandchild, born to a dead son.

There is no time for voices of the dead
in hurried years. I never knew how much
I missed her voice until it spoke again
and carried like a bell from then to now.



**Drawing of 1815 of *Castle Untersiemau* near Coburg, Germany,
where Scharlie's family lived for some generations**

As if she wanted me to find her things,
when I'm all set, when values shift, when skin
gets colourless like pencil drawings
and memories defend like castle moats,
when hair shows grey like still uncertain years,
when houses come and go, when blood delightfully
runs slower, not as water runs,
for it is thicker, so she said, than water.

Poetry

Ruins

‘Ruins are implicit in every structure.’

Roy Fuller



CHRIS NORRIS

Look close and see the hairline cracks invade.
The finest structures have the greatest share.
Wait till their outlines fade
 and so lay bare
Those artful makings artlessly unmade.

Red Shelley bade the mightiest kings despair
To think how that dismembered hulk betrayed
The brevity of their
 poor masquerade,
Its remnant sand-lashed by the desert air.

The aim precise, the plan minutely laid,
Yet soon they came, those signs of wear and tear
That rapidly conveyed
 how brief and rare
Perfection’s joy, how high the tariff paid.

Consult the blueprint, see grain-boundaries err,
The pending wreck in microform displayed,
And most distinctly where
 the highest-grade
Materials vouch a craftsman's utmost care.

Time may in time un-weave the double braid,
Send genes astray, entangle some base pair,
And launch a whole cascade
 of kinks to scare
Gene-sequencers tucked tight within their clade.

Some coders say there's back-up code to spare,
Redundant bits to halt the gene-glissade,
While some say 'face it square,
 that endless raid
On all that once declared your course set fair'.

Then we'll suspect the creed we called in aid
As fault-lines grew, the faith we'd scarcely dare
Give up lest doubt so preyed
 on us we'd bear
It with us like a pocket stun-grenade.

Why seek the answer to a loser's prayer
Unless it's in false promises we trade,
Or hopes we might outstare
 the scene replayed
Each time crazed mirrors catch us unaware.

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In Waking To Another Day



‘La vida es circunstancias’ ‘Life is circumstances ’

(Ortega Y Gasset, *Prologo Para los Alemanes* second edition, Madrid, page 62)

In waking to another day
And to other circumstances,
I wonder what waits in the way
Planned by the subterfuge of chances.

There is so much we have been through
Our marvelous meetings haunt my mind,
There is so much that’s still to do,
The looming Future’s undefined.

Better to hope, though Hope deceives,
Not let despondency prevail,
Springs bring the greening of the leaves
And what are seas for, but to sail?

Edward Greenwood