

The Wednesday

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Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford



Editorial

The Unending Quest

I have borrowed the title from Karl Popper's book *Unending Quest*. There comes a point in one's intellectual development when one asks what all this philosophical endeavour means. We read this in the intellectual history of many philosophers. However, a question that occupied my mind recently is why do we read one philosopher or philosophy rather than another, and what are we trying to get from our journey into the world of thought and philosophy?

Al-Ghazali, in the introduction to his *Refutation of the Philosophers*, published separately as *The Aims of the Philosophers*, talks about those who spend their lives following this philosopher, then that, and so on but getting nowhere. He also mentions the attraction of some names in philosophy that have a certain resonance, a cult status or authority. This has a special resonance in our time with certain names and what I call 'founding texts' – texts that generate movements. Such philosophers and their texts open new possibilities at first but eventually they limit the angle of vision for later philosophers and may prevent them from having a fresh look at the problem at hand and responding to it in their own creative way. However, the aim here is not to limit reading and thinking but to liberate us from being a slave to a single philosopher or a given trend of thought.

There are many responses to the question of why we read a certain philosopher or philosophy. One response is the academic one. You need a thorough knowledge of a philosopher/ philosophy for professional reasons. You become a Kantian, Hegelian, Nietzschean, Wittgensteinian or whatever. Specialization is part of the modern intellectual division of labour.

– the one who is interested in reading any and every philosopher or philosophy. One might find a certain philosophy attractive at a particular time, but one moves on from it, perhaps without abandoning it, to some other, because of a deep intellectual and psychological need, or one might want simply to continually obtain more knowledge. I find a great attraction and sympathy with this type. Years ago, I asked a friend who obtained a Ph.D. in philosophy in his retirement and kept turning up for courses and lectures in his old age, what was the end of his search. He said there was no cut off point but an unending quest. I think this is part of the wisdom that one gets from the tranquillity of old age when all competitive and striving drives come to rest and only what is fundamentally true will shine through.

However, there is another type which I call the creative type. It is the type that is not limited by the professional requirements of the first type which takes away all creativity in the wider sense of contributing to philosophy and thought generally in a free and original way, and also not the information or archive type of knowledge-gatherer who collects as much information as possible. This type goes beyond both to create new ideas which are not limited, or conditioned, by anything that does not belong by right to thought itself. This type joins the realm of thought as something eternal, on equal terms with all that has been said before but does not just repeat it as the information type does, or ask for its pedantic justification, as does the professional type who seeks to evaluate it and criticise it. Rather the creative type looks for the possibilities in the present and the future in order to create new openings in thought. However, I know this is hard and I keep reminding myself that it is easier said than done.

Another response is that of the information-gatherer

The Editor

Photons And Photos

The naked eye and the camera present us with the problem of imaging. What is an image and what is its role within cognition? Does imaging have a philosophical and theological interpretation? How is that related to scientific development? These and more questions are discussed below.

WILLIAM BISHOP

If life and cognition are not the same, then they have a symbiotic relationship to each other. Indeed, in *The Philosophy of Living* Francois Jullien points out that the Greek term 'physis' has been interpreted as 'nature in settled form' but that it originally meant the presence, or presencing, of appearance: an active rather than a settled phenomenon, and that Heraclitus conceived it to be a constant 'giving birth', of emergence and rising to appearance, as it 'loves to hide'.

This living conception of nature suggests a created world arising from a mysterious source. And complementing this, in his introduction to *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard remarks that he believes that everything specifically human in man is Logos, so that a person receives the echo of the creator by participating in the reverberation of the origin – the speaking being – so there is a direct sharing that is phenomenological and ontological. Additionally, Heraclitus appears to be the first philosopher to apply the term 'Logos' to the creative process thereby relating this to words and images.

So, what has all this to do with photons and photos? We are talking here about the emergence of phenomena and the human ability to cognize. And interestingly in this connection we find in the prologue to the Gospel of John a significant version of the term, Logos. The Logos is translated as the Word: 'All things were made through him and in him was life and the life was the light of men.' The implication is of continuity between nature and man where the light that informs nature also enlightens man. Man made in the image of God, bearer of the Logos, is integrated into the natural world of light and time.

Now matter can be understood as congealed or fractured light, which in this condition intercepts reflected light (casting shadows) enabling light reflected from these conglomerations to carry their forms (ideas), which can then be received and cognized by means of the light that enlightens every person. According to the perspective of modern science a photon (light particle) has no mass so in this respect it represents energy. But from the perspective of spiritual science light acts within the etheric dimension, which is the spiritual-life activity domain that interacts with matter. This makes images (carried in the light) a spiritual-physiological phenomenon. So, looking from the modern scientific perspective that adopts Einstein's formula $E=MC^2$ (energy equals mass times the speed of light squared), we might wonder that when the shattering of matter (with the atomic bomb) produces light, whether this implies the corollary that shattered light is matter.

Anyway, my particular philosophical interest in the image is its role within cognition. I see the image as an intermediary between cognition and phenomena. In vision of the external world a trace of this external world is carried in the reflected light which incorporates the image, which then stimulates the mind connected to the eye that receives the light impressions. This way of comprehending the process of vision tends towards a philosophical and theological interpretation but it can be complemented by the modern scientific approach, for each approach need not necessarily be mutually exclusive.

Cognition is possible through each of our senses and each sense complements the others but cognition itself would be impossible without the mind. Arguably this relates to *man* being



‘Canary Wharf’ - a harmoniously balanced documentary picture that captures an instant in historical time.
(by *William Bishop*)

made in the *image of God*, for when the mind is understood as connected to spirit, a spiritual dimension enters cognition. The visual sense is particularly dominant in Western culture and it is the visual image that conveys well the connection between spirit and matter. The image is linked by light as the medium that both conveys it to the mind and enables the mind to interpret it.

Images have always served a sacred purpose, but it is no coincidence that photography as a ‘mechanical’ means of capturing images was born into a world at a time of deepest materialism with its philosophy of Positivism, during the second third of the nineteenth century. This newly arrived medium made it possible to reproduce the world as images mechanically with the aid of light. But while the sheer all-pervasive aspect of photography has altered the way we see and relate to the world, the effect of the medium depends very much on how it is used. Here the human operator is decisive because the mind subtly imposes its ideology and the heart grounds its emotion in the image. In this respect, among its multiple uses, photography lends itself selflessly to the artist and sensibility of the photographer,

which manifests in the phenomenon of the image. In this respect it is possible to construct a history of artistic photography.

The camera is like an external eye. It is a darkened chamber with an iris and lens attached. When the shutter over the ‘eye’ is released the light sensitive film in the dark chamber is exposed to the image within the reflected light. With the modern camera the shutter is released and returns within hundredth of a second depending on the size of the aperture and the brightness of the light. Apart from light and technology and the mind, a vital ingredient of photography is time. Numerous cameras and processing methods have come into use since the public announcement of photography in 1839 and these have a marked effect on what is made possible and on the final result. For instance, photojournalism became enhanced when the hand-held camera using 35mm roll film was introduced during the 1920’s with its almost instant exposure and portability. And then some camera artists still use the large format camera of earlier days. Here the large screen-size negative on average around 10 x 8 inches records very fine detail.

Philosophy and Photography

Photography is also subject to fashions. For example, in the second half of the nineteenth century there was a craze for the carte-de-visite (the size of a visiting card), showing a scenic view or portrait of a celebrity. Another enthusiasm at this time was for stereoscopic photography where a view was taken by a camera with two lenses set apart from each other at the same distance as the eyes. The two images obtained were then mounted and viewed through two lenses set in a viewing frame. When viewed in this way the two images merged into a single three-dimensional image, as with normal vision of the world. Colour photography was another important development when it became commercially available in the 1930's. Again, the model for this was the human eye which science informs us contains three basic colours which blend to provide vision over the whole range of the colour spectrum. Arguably this raises the question of whether or not the phenomenal world is coloured or whether colour vision is due to the constitution of the eye - an argument that could run and run!

The story of photography also includes a community dimension. Soon after it came into use small groups formed into clubs and societies. The Calotype Club, established in 1847, included the energetic Roger Fenton who was also a pioneer war photographer famous for his 1855 'documentary' photographs of the Crimean War. He also established the Photographic Society of London in 1853. This later became the Royal Photographic Society, which exists to this day. During the 1970's, first in America and later in Britain, creative photography began to be taught in colleges. Prior to this only the technical and practical side was taught at college level. From this a small-scale workshop culture developed and in the mood of self-development of the late 1970's and early 1980's, groups of a different kind from the established group-think of photography club culture were formed. These were interested in mutual support while maintaining independence of expression and had something in common with the very early photographic groups. An example of this is London Independent Photography. This was founded jointly in 1987 by Janet Hall and Virginia Khuri in which I was an early

member. Independence here meant freedom from commercial considerations and club visual conventions. In fact, it is possible to say that this group tried to embody the idea expressed by John Berger in his book, *Ways of Seeing*: 'If the new language of images were used differently, it would, through its use, confer a new kind of power. Within it we could begin to define our experience more precisely in areas where words are inadequate. (Seeing comes before words)'.

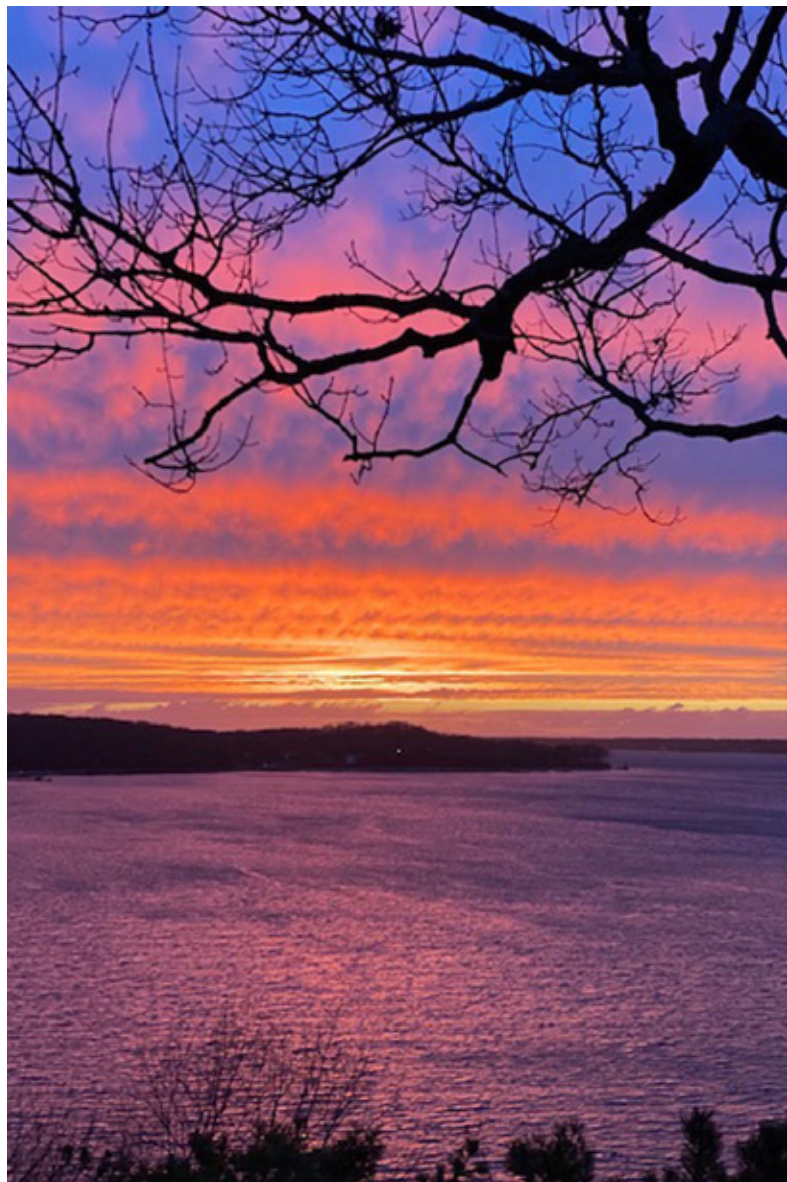
It was out of this enthusiasm for personal vision and realizing personal truths that after a decade of freelance writing on photography and reviewing exhibitions I launched a small-scale quarterly photography journal in 1991 initially as a newsletter serving the independent groups that had formed in Britain. But heady days pass and then we find that the deckchairs have been moved. Indeed, as Heraclitus said, 'You can't step into the same river twice'.

In recent years the mobile phone with camera has given virtually everyone the opportunity to poke the camera's eye around in all locations and directions to the extent that life in images becomes more significant than the experience of actual life in the world, or its vindication. So, in retrospect, we can confidently say that the trajectory of photography began as a novelty in 1839 when nature was still felt to be powerfully present, and then a balance developed between 'reality' and its image. At this stage nature, as landscape, featured as a subject, but now technology has taken the upper hand, creating a house of images that inhabit us, ultimately drawing us into a virtual world, more virtual than the one we see with our own eyes.

So, to conclude: What is an image, whether photographic, physiological or mental? It would appear to be an intermediary between the thing-in-itself and the self; and in this respect points a finger towards the phenomenon that enables cognition to take place without requiring us to become that phenomenon. This is acceptable where 'matter' is concerned but in the case of non-material beings, the ability to merge with them may be the only means of cognition because



‘Spirit of Place’ – showing use of shallow focus with back-lit scene to achieve a graphic image conveying spirit of place.
(by *William Bishop*)



‘Christmas Sunset’ – an unmanipulated image reliant on selection of subject, place and time.
(by *Virginia Khuri*)

beings invisible to the human eye will not present in the form of an image – unless deliberately enabled for the sake of communication at the human sense level. If this is the case then being made in the Image of God must be a mysterious instance of *Being* connecting *being* with humans, as wonderfully depicted in the celebrated image of ‘Creation’ by Michelangelo on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, where Being connects with human

being through barely touching fingers. Spirit, not subject to time and space, can be immanent, while light as an intermediary has a mysterious status upon which the image in space depends. We see in the light and by means of the light and photons are one way of conceptualizing light (with their photo-electric dimension) but the living aspect of light ‘loves to hide’. Such is life when matter is nested in the spirit.

Force of the Universe

Wind connects to Spirit,
to the Universe
all that is love, whole,
for as the wind blows
and no one knows
where it came from
or where it goes,

so is Spirit,
force of the Universe
that fills with life
and brings
light

through all changes,
in turmoil and conflict,
in discovery and knowledge,
side by side.

6

We are re-learning only now
of our place under the Sun,
of our kinship with the Earth
and all its connections,
as our ancestors knew.



Let us hold on to the old truth
that all things are Spirit
and embrace this universal knowledge,
given to all,
to assist us on our path in this life
and our journey
from the Earth to the Sky.

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Reports of The Wednesday Meetings Held During February 2021

Written by RAHIM HASSAN

Photography and Ways of Seeing

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 3rd February.

Photography is a topic that has attracted very few philosophers, but it has proven its intellectual interest for members of our group. William Bishop, a member of *The Wednesday* group and editor of the photography quarterly *Inscape*, gave a very interesting talk on photography. The talk took us on a historical trajectory of the development of photography, together with ways of seeing, from the rudimentary Camera Obscura, and the early sensitive silver covered papers, to reaching and photographing the moon on the moon, and earth from space.

William introduced his talk with some remarks about the philosophical ground for the power of making images, before detailing the technical aspect of capturing images. Images and imagination, we were told, have a trace of wonder beyond the intellect and this wonder connects with wisdom. Wisdom is part of the name of philosophy. Theologically, the human being was made in the image of God. William referred to the name 'God' as the word that names the incomprehensible power that manifests itself in the world as a cosmic power. The human being is also endowed with the power to make images, through the imagination, and to interpret images. Because we live in time and space, we take

images of the ideal archetypes as real. Human beings also represent nature and capture the constant flow of images and scenes in nature. The Subject interrupts and interprets nature through images.

The relationship of the eye to nature was enhanced by the birth of the camera which works on the same principle as the eye at a very basic level. Nature, or the outside, enters via light into the eye and reaches the retina. The camera does something similar. The camera and the eye both capture a form (or gestalt) and they both need a mind to select the scene and interpret the image. Photography does not only need equipment and technological development but also a mind that directs it. There is an ideological aspect to how we see and select images from our surroundings. There are three more determinants of seeing: cultural, professional and individual sensitivities.

What is an image? It is, in its most basic form, a pattern of black and white dots. In the early days pioneer photographers used a special silver plate. They then used sensitive paper. The paper has to be washed chemically to fix the affected silver and to remove the unaffected remainder. On 9th January 1839 the French Academy of Sciences announced Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre's daguerreotype photography process to the world. The image was printed on a copper plate coated with silver. It was a shock to some quarters and a German newspaper considered it a blasphemy because the machine, according to the paper's interpretation, was capturing the image of God. In the same year the English scientist William Henry Fox Talbot announced his invention of the salted paper to process images. With these inventions modern photography was born.

We viewed a slideshow created by William which contained classic photos taken by renowned photographers such as Bill Brandt, Cartier-Bresson, Ansell Adams, and Paul Strand. The participants in the meeting made extensive comments, particularly on the relation between photography and painting and the merits of each. We also had an interesting debate on whether seeing is immediate or mediated by interpretation.



Oxfordshire (2021) by Paul Cockburn

Hobbes and His Troubled Times

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 10th February.

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) is famous for his political philosophy, but his work encompasses a much wider scope. He went to Oxford at the age of 14, and lived to the ripe age of 91 and was mentally active throughout his long life. His travels in Italy, and a long exile to France, made him personally acquainted with many of the great philosophers and scientists of his time. Edward Greenwood gave us a very interesting talk on Hobbes, highlighting his main thoughts and interests and covering in particular his books the *Leviathan* and *The Citizen*.

Why lower case here? The emotions were central to Hobbes' ideas, especially fear. There is an anecdote from Hobbes' biography that is prophetic of his future development. Hobbes described his turbulent birth by saying: 'For through the scattered towns a rumour ran that our people's last day was coming in a fleet, and in so much fear my mother conceived at that time that she gave birth to twins: myself and Fear. That, I think, is why I loathe my country's enemies, love peace and the Muse and courteous companions'. Fear and the need for security were central to his conception of politics, peace and prosperity.

Hobbes was responding to the troubled times he lived through during the Civil War in England. He thought the way out of political strife is through a social contract. His view of the social contract is that individuals, in the state of nature, come to realize that they need to transfer their allegiance to one person, making him the sovereign, in order that he will protect them and provide them with the conditions under which they can prosper. The sovereign himself is not bound by the contract, so as to avoid sectarianism and party politics. But if the sovereign cannot defend them, then they can withdraw their allegiance. This is how Hobbes justified his acceptance of Cromwell after his return from Paris to England.

Hobbes was critical of Aristotle and favoured the scientific method. But his method, which he wanted to apply to the physical world and to the world of politics, was based on deductive geometry, relying on definitions, axioms and theorems. This brought Hobbes into conflict with the Royal Society and Robert Boyle in particular. On the other hand, Hobbes conceived of the world and the mind as matter and motion, and developed a reductionist theory, close to present-day neurological



Leviathan, 1651 edition

theories of the mind. Edward objected to such a conception of the mind because it confused the condition of thought, i.e. having a brain, with the nature of thought.

Hobbes also didn't accept non-substantial matter, such as spirit or soul, although he wasn't an atheist and accepted the second coming of Christ and the resurrection. However, Hobbes did object to the idea of a soul existing independently of the body and rejected the idea of purgatory.

The thesis of his major work *Leviathan* was made emblematic by the engraving on the cover of the first edition, published in 1651. Edward explained the symbolism of the different parts of the engraving and what Quentin Skinner made of it in his book *From Humanism to Hobbes*. Basically, the sovereign holds the earthly power (the state) and the spiritual power (the church), his body is made of his subjects, he defends the land and provides security, and below him are all the powers that he needs to subdue.

Women in Philosophy: Epistemology and Testimony

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 17th February.

Ursula Mary Blythe was keen to celebrate *Women in Philosophy* whilst challenging some epistemic assumptions concerning 'gender' in philosophy. She demonstrated how women are traditionally ignored in the history of philosophy, especially under the guise of 'The Great Philosophers'. One such woman was Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97) who campaigned vigorously for educational reform for girls and social status for women; claiming that 'such changes would benefit all society'. Wollstonecraft has become more recognised for her ground-breaking feminist critique: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), but she also wrote about travel expeditions and current affairs. A sculpture of Mary Wollstonecraft was erected in November 2020 at Newington Green in North London.



Mary Wollstonecraft

Ursula highlighted the low representation of female PhD students and professional staff in contemporary philosophy which can impede women's ability to produce innovative philosophical work. Part of the problem is that female authors do not feature prominently on recommended philosophy reading lists. Yet, their involvement in philosophy goes back centuries, particularly during the Romantic movement and the Enlightenment, as well as participating in modern analytical and existentialist debates. Many universities have recognised the issue of male domination in philosophy seminars, so they often engage in practices to reduce this inequity, such as taking female questions before opening the floor to the male majority. Ursula suggested doing this as a social experiment, but unfortunately this request brought this issue to the fore. Some male participants argued that 'gender' did not matter, as it is about discussing philosophy itself. However, gender plays out in knowledge practices and power relations which have historically shaped epistemic systems of exclusion.

Crenshaw, Karyn Lai, and Angela Davis. We watched a clip from the Hannah Arendt film known as 'The Final Speech' where Arendt (1963) argued that the 'incapability to think' created the possibility for many ordinary men to commit evil deeds on a massive scale in Nazi Germany and beyond. Meanwhile, back in Britain whilst the men were away at war, the Oxford 'Quartet' (i.e. Iris Murdoch, Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, and Mary Midgley) emerged from Oxford University as a dominant force in moral philosophy.

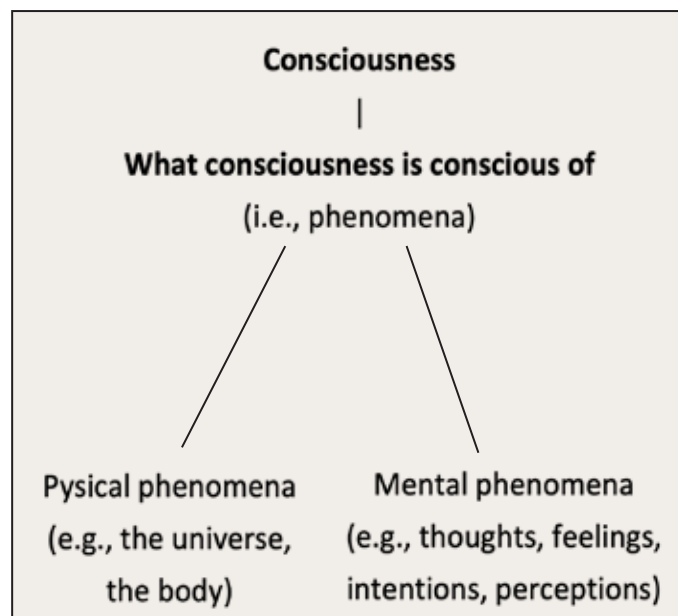
These incredible women believed that the purpose of philosophy was to think carefully about human life itself, in terms of what is important and what is trivia, and what is knowledge for? In her final book, Midgley (2018) defended philosophy against the rampant developments in science and technology. She asserted that 'we still need philosophy to help us think about the big questions of meaning, knowledge, and value'. Ursula also shared documentary footage of Angela Davis putting the American system of criminology on trial, as a black woman living through segregation and the civil rights movement. There was not enough time to present the remarkable contributions from Mary Warnock, Martha Nussbaum, Judith Butler, and many others.

(This report was written by Ursula Blythe)

Consciousnism: Only Consciousness is Real

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 24th February.

Ruud Schuurman has a theory about what is real. It is not physical or mental entities but consciousness. He does not take consciousness to be a mental phenomenon, a property of a mind, or otherwise require a host. In fact, he does not take consciousness to be a phenomenon at all. Neither in the literal sense of an 'appearance' nor in the figurative sense of a 'real existent' or 'stuff'. He neither takes consciousness to be a physical nor a mental phenomenon. On the contrary, he takes consciousness to be that which is conscious of *all* phenomena, and to be prior to and presupposed by all phenomena. So, Ruud argues that consciousness and what consciousness is conscious of are of a completely different order. That consciousness is literally extra-ordinary, not of the natural order, but outside and above it, that is, supernatural, and thus trans-categorical, trans-conceptual, attributeless, and thus on a par with *being* and God.



He calls his theory Consciousnism, as opposed to Dualism, Materialism, Idealism, Physicalism, Panpsychism, Neutral monism, and other 'isms'. This was the core idea that he presented to *The Wednesday* meeting or rather he has been presenting to us on all the occasions when he has addressed the group, albeit in different vocabularies. It was a very lively and interactive presentation with plenty of time allowed for discussion.

Ruud started the talk by pointing out there are many problems in the philosophy of mind. He then noted that the problems are not getting solved, nor is there any definitive solution in sight. We may be making progress on the so-called easy problems of consciousness (i.e., cognitive, affective, conative problems, i.e., problems of thinking, feelings, willing, perceiving), but those are problems of mind rather than of consciousness. He also claimed that, in desperation, we are taking the weirdest theories seriously.

From the above Ruud concluded that we are stuck. He then asked: Why are we stuck? And how can we get unstuck? His answer is Consciousnism: we are not human beings that have consciousness, but we are consciousness. As one participant pointed out, this implies a radical change of perspective. Ruud

confirmed this and explained it by means of a picture (shown here): The primary distinction is that between consciousness and what consciousness is conscious of. This corresponds to the distinction between what I am (i.e., consciousness) and what I am not (i.e., all that I am conscious of). It also corresponds to what is real (i.e., consciousness) and what is not real (i.e., all that I am conscious of). All other distinctions are subordinate to this distinction. For example, the distinction between physical and mental, the distinction between past and future, the distinction between dreams and waking life, and so on.

An objection was made that the problem of consciousness came about because of the primacy given to theoretical reason in philosophy, 'I think, therefore I am', and that the solution is a theory that gives primacy instead to the practical, 'I do, therefore I am'. But then both theory and practice have to be taken to their ground and that will be Consciousnism, 'I am conscious, therefore I am'.

All in all, we had an interesting discussion but ran out of time. Thus, we did not have a chance to discuss the impact of Consciousnism on the problems of consciousness, and questions like how we get from metaphysical monism to the many minds we see in the world and also the activities we do in the world.

Elements

(For Edward Greenwood)

For by Art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMON-WEALTH, or STATE, which is but an Artificial Man; though of greater stature and strength than the Natural, for whose protection and defence it was intended; and in which, the Sovereignty is an Artificial Soul, as giving life and motion to the whole body.

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*

Being in a gentleman's library, Euclid's *Elements* lay open . . . [Hobbes] read the proposition 47. 'By G—,' said he, 'this is impossible!' So he reads the demonstration of it, which referred him back to such a proposition; which proposition he read. That referred him back to another, which he also read. *Et sic deinceps*, that at last he was demonstratively convinced of that truth. This made him in love with geometry.

After he began to reflect on the interest of the king of England as touching his affairs between him and the parliament, for ten years together his thoughts were much, or almost altogether, unhinged from the mathematiques; but chiefly intent on his *De Cive*, and after that on his *Leviathan*: which was a great putt-back to his mathematical improvement..

John Aubrey, *A Brief Life of Thomas Hobbes, 1588-1679*



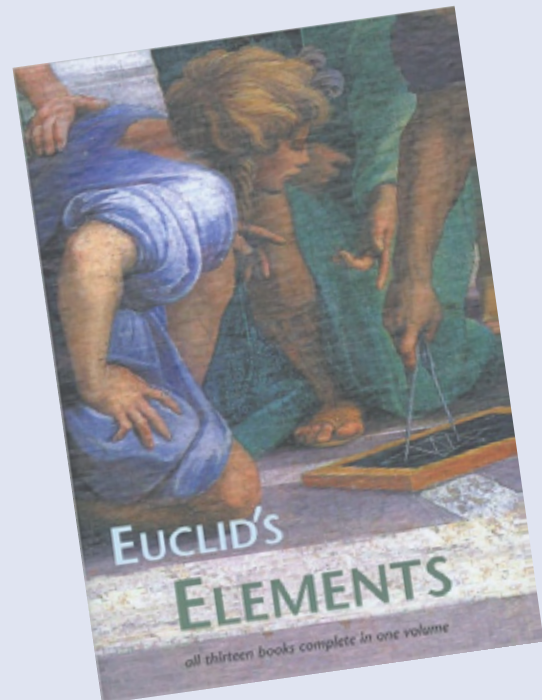
CHRIS NORRIS

'By God', I cried, 'this reasoning cannot hold!'
(God witness, it's for emphasis I'd swear.)
'May not the greatest thinkers sometimes err?
The proposition stinks, if truth be told.'
But then I saw the *Elements* unfold,
Found truth conserved, the geometry foursquare,
The logic faultless, and, shown everywhere,
The *a priori* knowledge that consoled
A contumelious mind. 'Such forceless force
Of logic, how it brings us worms to know
Those certain truths thrown up in reason's course,
All set out *more geometrico*
And thus requiring all men to endorse
Them without question or let logic go.'

From that rapt moment on I sought to share
 Its tumult-quelling gift with all who'd stow
 Their grievances, avert the body blow
 Of civil war, take counsel, and declare
 Themselves of reason's party *après-guerre*,
 Hence resolute to let no conflict throw
 Such transient fallings-out into the flow
 Of thoughts as one by one they move to their
 Resistless q.e.d. How not abate
 Those noxious feuds, that chaos come again,
 Those late debaucheries of Church and State,
 When Euclid sets his case out pikestaff-plain
 In close-linked axioms fit to demonstrate
 Their truth even to my befuddled brain.

I wrote my book *Leviathan* to teach
 Those sectaries the error of their ways,
 To lead them by example through the maze
 Of falsehoods spread by zealots out to preach
 Sedition and the anarch's code of each
 Man his own conscience, qualified to raise
 A schism, creed, or army, or – in days
 Not long gone by – a monstrous gaping breach
 In reason's commonwealth. Let *civis* learn
 From geometer not prelate, statesman take
 A course in axiomatics, preacher turn
 To Euclid for instruction – then they'll make
 Good all the damage done by those who spurn
 The way of truth for private passion's sake.

Truth absolute, indubitable, shown
 By formal proof, and thereby proof against
 Mob sentiment, unreason, brains incensed
 By ranting oratory, rebellion grown
 To compass regicide – it's that alone,
 That one sure anchor-point, that recompensed
 The ages of stupidity condensed
 In that phrase 'civil war' whose gist I groan
 Once more to recollect. A forlorn hope,
 I sometimes think, my bookish quest to coax
 The zealots down, have calmer passions cope
 In such wild times when reason's voice provokes
 Rekindled strife. Yet soon enough I'll grope
 My next inch forward despite the taunts and jokes.



Euclid's Elements



Poetry

They're prey to phantasms, to all the tricks
And shape-shift sorceries that craze the mind
When Proteus meddles with the laws of kind,
Sets men at odds, confounds their politics,
And looses on them that unholy mix
Of party, faith and avarice combined
That leaves Leviathan compelled to find,
Sans sovereign reason, other ways to fix
Its storm-tossed voyaging. Then, to be sure,
Unending motion holds the only key
To minds as well as bodies; thoughts endure
No more than shapes or sizes, and if we
Think otherwise it's only till the lure
Of motion drives us whales back out to sea.

My death draws nigh and says 'Don't be afraid',
Which counsel now, *aetatis* eighty-four,
I take to heart and cherish all the more
For having lived by reason's light and made,
As best I could, its rule the one that weighed
Most strongly with me since inclined to draw,
In those my books, sound lessons from the store
Of ancient precedents now aptly laid
Before our warring tribes. As bodies yield
To intellect, so they must yield to laws
Prescribed, and rightly so, by those who wield
The sovereign power to separate just cause
From unjust, act as Everyman's best shield,
And keep Leviathan from Satan's jaws.

To Malmesbury I'll soon return and die,
Perhaps, with childhood landmarks clear in view,
The ancient monastery and castle, two
Fine citadels of Church and State, set high
On that opposing hillside and, to my
Mind even then, each with its power to do
Great good or harm; trust reason and stay true
To virtue's cause or further amplify
Our discords lately quelled. For nothing stirs
The blood to faction, feud and all the woes
Of civil war like powers abused, nor spurs
The virtuous mind more firmly to oppose
War's evils than the insight that confers
Such peace as civic geometry bestows.



Hobbes



The war of all against all

Yet I've no ready answer, none to quiet
 Their taunts or my own doubts, when sceptics mock
 My thought that Euclid's proofs might ease the shock
 Of civil strife, cool hotheads ere they riot,
 Bring social peace through change of mental diet,
 Or – sheer absurdity! – provide a rock
 Of shared assent for those inclined to knock
 The block off any party who won't buy it
 When they dictate what's what. And there's the fact,
 Much dwelt on by those carpers, that so far
 From lying low, preferring thought to act,
 And hiding in my study lest I mar
 The Euclid moment, I've at no time lacked
 For worldly ways to chase Dame Fortune's star.

Nor should they count me fool enough to think
 It might, that moment, somehow overleap
 The confine of my skull and swiftly creep,
 As if by occult medium, link by link,
 Into the skulls of those caught on the brink
 Of civil war, contriving thus to keep
 Their nations free of all that else might sweep
 Whole polities to limbo in a blink
 Of its Cyclopic eye. What might the name
 'Hobbes' signify, in popular repute,
 If not the wicked infidel whose aim
 Is to relinquish mind and soul to brute
 Materiality, and who'd proclaim
 Such mystic notions kids' stuff to refute?

That gets me wrong, flat wrong, but I'll concede
 One point: there's no royal road, nor (if you please)
 Republican thought-highway fit to ease
 My contrarities, my twofold need
 That civic order take the form decreed
 By reason's rule and, as I see in these
 Bad times, that no fake nostrum claim to ease
 The restless passions chafing to stampede
 In all men, me not least. They'll read my works
 In times to come, those scholars, and enquire
 What demon drove me on, what tumult lurks
 Behind the Euclid-tale they so admire,
 Or why that soothing anecdote still irks
 One lured as much by reason as desire.

The Wednesday

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Stillness Outside



Stillness outside, the branches bare
And not a birdsong's sound,
A mist dissolving meets my stare,
Dew sparkles on the ground.

The sun is out, the sky is blue,
And all's set for the day,
What secret does the landscape hold?
Ah that it won't betray.

Cathedral towers seem to speak
Across the sunlit space,
Their message has long passed its peak
Leaving the faintest trace.

The towers point towards the sky
Beyond which souls once dwelt,
A plane occasionally goes by
I watch the white trail melt.

If life on earth its sorrows brings,
With much that's hard to bear,
Its joys are real substantial things
And not just empty air.

Though Love its fight with Death must lose,
It burns with greater power
If we will seize the day and choose
To pluck life's finest flower.

And that is when two loves embrace
And try to be as one,
To occupy one single space
All separation gone.

Edward Greenwood



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