

# The *Wednesday*

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Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford



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## Editorial

### *Facing The Question Of Music*

*The Wednesday* meeting decided to consider the theme of music during the month of March. We had three presentations, reports of which are given in this issue of the magazine. One topic that was discussed was the language of music on its own. A second topic concerned musical criticism and literary theory. The third topic was on the relationship between music and politics or 'radical music'. The response of the participants in these meetings was remarkable and many ideas were brought up. The overall picture is that music is independent of literature and politics and takes us into a spiritual dimension, although it has connections with literary style and politics.

The question that comes to my mind after these three meetings is: What is the necessity of music? It seems that music is rooted in us as individuals, and in societies and civilizations. From Pythagoras to Beethoven, music always finds a resonance in the soul. It has been suggested by some philosophers that there is also a cosmic sound generated by the planetary spheres. Schopenhauer thought that music is a copy of the metaphysical will that drives us and everything in existence. From pagan societies to medieval religion to post-modern societies, music has always played a role, from the chanting of prayers and hymns to chanting in modern political demonstrations.

One of the old stories in Arabic literature is that of a philosopher who walked into a princely court in Aleppo (Syria) with a musical instrument. He looked strange and was undervalued at first. But then he played his instrument and everyone in the gathering laughed. He changed the tune and this time everyone cried. He changed it a third time and everyone fell asleep and then he left. It is an interesting story. Some say that it happened to al-Farabi, the famous philosopher. It could have been fabricated but al-Farabi wrote a major book on music and is credited with inventing a musical instrument.

There is a long tradition of both paintings and music in Islamic culture over the centuries, apart from the early period of Islam where it was thought the people, who were still close to the time of idols, might be affected by images and be diverted from worshipping a transcendent God. Beside al-Farabi, there is a major book, in several volumes, from the 9<sup>th</sup> century with the title *The Songs*. It records hundreds of songs that were played in Baghdad at the time. It has a description of the music in each entry, in what we would call musical notation.

In Islamic culture, music took three directions: private songs for certain private occasions, courtly songs and religious songs. There are close connections between them in themes and styles but they differ in function. Religious songs are of interest because they were celebrated in mystical circles. They were controversial and some mystics, Ibn Arabi in particular, objected to them, but they became widely used right up to the present time. Perhaps the Whirling Dervishes are one example; Sufi music from Andalusia is another.

These trends moved through Islamic culture into Spain and then Europe, generating the movement known as music of the troubadours, which popularised the theme of love in the more puritanical culture of the Christian West.

There are more historical details to be told, but the aim is to demonstrate the relevance of music to human life and feelings. However, music is a challenge to any reductionist philosophy that wishes to eliminate mind or spirit. Music is a reminder that the human subject is not reducible to a machine or neurology, but is full of life, feeling, aspiration and longing that might be of a mystical nature.

*The Editor*

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# The Language of Music

Members of *The Wednesday* group selected contrasting passages of music that mean something to them and on the last Wednesday of March we reflected on two dozen passages. Each member spoke briefly about how they felt the music complemented any lyrics, video or programme associated with it. Deliberately no time was allowed for philosophical debate on the language of music. Instead, in Wittgenstein's words, members were encouraged to "look and see" – *Philosophical Investigations* §66 – or rather, to "listen and hear".

## CHRIS SEDDON

### Cultural Homogeneity

The selections felt diverse, with pieces from different periods, countries, and musical traditions, but it is noteworthy that all selections came from the last three hundred and fifty years and our own two continents – a fraction of the musical heritage theoretically available to us. Eleven dated from the mid-twentieth century – all from the popular commercial music traditions of England and North America. The others comprised one jazz and one slave emancipation song from North America plus eleven pieces from the western art music tradition of the USA, England, Austria, Italy, Russia, and France.

### Other Media

Only four of the selections had no lyrics: Messaien's *Vingt Regards - Joie*, Barber's *Adagio*, Holst's *Mars*, and Mozart's *Gigue*. Barber subsequently added lyrics to the *Adagio*, and only Mozart's *Gigue* had no specific programme. Donizetti's *Mad Scene from Lucia di Lammermoor* was also associated with specific visual media, as were the five most recent items with official music videos. Thus, with one exception, the selections presented music as part of a multi-media presentation.

### Techniques of Evocation

Members were encouraged to note musical techniques which evoked their emotions, including:

- Melodic contour, including rising or falling motifs and climaxes
- Harmonic contour, shifting chords with predictable or unexpected changes
- Metre and rhythm, including beats in a bar and bars in a phrase

- Pace and volume, including gradual or sudden climaxes
- Harmonic tension, including dissonance or suspended notes that only slowly resolve
- Harmonic modes – major, minor, atonal, or other
- Repetition of notes, motifs, harmonies, and sections
- Horizontal melodic lines versus vertical blocks of synchronised chords
- Instrumentation – colour, contrast, and conventions
- Traditional or innovative forms and conventions
- Virtuosity and simplicity
- Improvisation and phrasing - free or strict rhythm, articulation, and pitch

### Climaxes

Every selection followed some traditional forms, but each also seemed to exploit techniques within that form either consciously or otherwise to evoke a key emotion. Invariably an emotional climax in the lyrics or implied narrative was accompanied by a gradual increase in pace, pitch, or harmonic tension. *Lucia* cries out for her absent lover in the extremity of her madness with a high E flat. Escaping slaves drive their wagon ever more urgently in a rhythmic canter towards the safety of the north indicated by the *Drinkin' Gourd* constellation. The lover suffering *Needles and Pins* of betrayed love shifts the harmony up a tone to try and rise above the illusion, but almost immediately up another tone to repeat ever more urgently the refrain of its hold on him. *Martial* trombones and trumpets interrupt with each other in rising semitones. The anxious penitent begs God



Henry Purcell

in ever rising repetitions to *Hear My Prayer*. A passionate lover expresses in rising sequences her gratitude that *All is Well*, and at the peak swoops even higher to fall to rest on her lover's breast.

### Combinations of Symbols

There were other examples of rising melodic sequences, but the same technique expresses something quite different in each case. Unlike the ecstatic climax in *All is Well*, the rising sequences near the end of the *Prayer* express painful longing and uncertainty when combined with the dissonance of independent vocal lines holding on to their note so long that they conflict with the harmony of other voices, and the tonal ambiguity created throughout by the use of a motif in both its rising and falling form including both the major and the minor third, and the absence of either a major or a minor third in the final chord. *Lucia's* climax is mad rather than ecstatic, because she has already lost touch with the ground of the orchestra and is accompanied only by an echoing flute symbolic of her imaginary lover. The rising sequences in the *War* between brasses are combined with an obstinately immovable note in jarring cross-rhythms alongside inexorably

repeated rhythms from the rest of the orchestra.

In this *War* five beats in a bar with emphatic triplets and a shorter second half of the bar continually wrong-foot us with a first beat that comes before we are ready for it. By contrast the slow five beat rhythm of the layered background vocals of *The Sun Rising* creates a relaxed shifting pattern with the four beats of the main vocal and rhythmic line like the overlapping phases of cyclic time – which is further enhanced by repetitive time-reverse photography and matching time-reversed musical tones. Coming between four-beat passages with insistent percussion, however, the additional beat in the very slow five-beat phrases over sustained chords of *Shoemaker's Laudato* creates a feeling of extended space, as do the extra beats in the hymn-like pauses in Barber's *Adagio*.

The very slow three beats in each bar of *Jerusalem* also create a feeling of space, but with a rhetorical inevitability underpinned by a very slow subliminal melody formed by the first note of each bar climbing up to the submediant, then falling step-wise in repeated notes to the subdominant, rising again, and finally landing, Churchill like, squarely on the final tonic through a series of

## Philosophy and Music



Bach



Mozart

not one, nor two, but three falling fifths. More obvious repeated notes at the start of each line of the verse echo *Dessie Warren's* insistence that he be treated as a human with a name; less obvious is the conventional but equally apposite three-chord rhetoric paralleled by a melody stridently on the dominant of each chord before falling to the tonic at the end: This, that; this, the other? This, that; this, the other - this!

### Musical Propositions

The selected pieces all expressed emotions – even the non-programmatic *Gigue* seemed to express a kind of impish joy in placing a conventionally grieving chromatic motif in a tightly-knit formal structure combining binary form, compound time, four-part fugue, and kaleidoscopic cross-rhythms. By contrast the session opened with music which could be said to express propositions – the Japanese equivalent of our Pelican crossing free-to-walk tone is a complete though tinny melody, and bugle calls tell soldiers unambiguously when to fall in, line up for meals, or turn out to fight a fire.

In these unusual cases, each rudimentary melody acts as a single word or lexeme, but with an internal structure that expresses emotions using techniques similar to less functional music – compare the elegant call to meals for officers with the peremptory call for men, and the urgent three-fold repetitions of the fire alarm.

### Initial Conclusions

Music expresses emotions through signs that are partly conventional – such as the pastoral oboe d'amore and third-person of the trinity represented in both Bach pieces – and partly natural – such as relative dissonance and pitch, and certain structures of harmony and rhythm. These signs are combined, not in a rigorous grammar, but creatively to cumulative effect. In this way music differs greatly from rigorous artificial language such as mathematics, but has much in common with the freer structures of natural language such as poems, novels, or even rhetorical philosophical articles.

### Extracts Submitted

*Hear my Prayer* Purcell; *Vergnügte Ruh* Bach; *Erbarme dich* Bach; *Gigue* Mozart; *The Mad Scene from Lucia di Lammermoor* Donizetti; *Follow the Drinking Gourd* The Weavers; *Zdes' khorosho* Rachmaninov; *Christos voskres* Rachmaninov; *Mars, the Bringer of War* Holst; *Jerusalem* Parry; *St James Infirmary* Mills / Armstrong; *Adagio* Barber; *Vingt Regards – Joie* Messiaen; *Needles and Pins* The Seekers; *Turn, Turn, Turn* Seeger; *Electricity* Beefheart; *All along the Watchtower* Dylan / Hendrix; *Let It Be* McCartney; *The Sun Rising (Tom's Drum and Bass Mix)* The Beloved; *Half Angel Half Eagle* Siberry; *Lucky You* Lightning Seeds; *My Name is Dessie Warren* Prowse; *Scaretale* Nightwish; *Shoemaker* Nightwish.



**In the Moonlight**

When I gazed at the stars  
seeking answers in their radiance  
moonlight poured out  
over your face  
your sad eyes  
your trembling lips

Compassion springs from the water  
rustles in the thorny rose bushes  
moon-silvered tonight  
it lightens up the worry  
about your glittering tears  
your flushed cheeks

but you are gone  
in the sudden lunar eclipse  
when darkness strikes



## ***Reports of The Wednesday Meetings Held During March 2021***

Written by RAHIM HASSAN

### Music, Literary Theory and Philosophy

#### ***Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 3<sup>rd</sup> March.***

We were treated to a fascinating talk on musicology in the presentation by Professor Chris Norris on the relationship between music, literary theory and philosophy. He followed the story of music criticism since Plato. It was the first full presentation on the subject of music and philosophy in *The Wednesday* meetings and set the scene for two further talks on the subject in March.

Chris introduced his talk by relating his experience of music as a child listening to BBC radio children's programmes (lots of Ravel!) and also speaking about his formative musical years as a choir boy and listening to broadcasts of Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Delius and other composers.

Getting to philosophy, he talked about the classical idea of the metaphysical significance of music for philosophy. He mentioned Plato but only briefly. Plato thought that music could lead to a more spirited character in the guardian class in his republic, but it could also lead to a weakening in other less spirited characters. However, a mature reflection on music came during the period of German Idealism, the post-Kantian philosophers and the Romantic poets and philosophers. Kant himself had naive musical tastes and a rigidly categorical way of thinking that shunned what Deleuze would call intensive multiplicities. Schelling talked about music in his *Philosophy of Art*. But it was Schopenhauer who was credited with raising the metaphysical standing of music by taking it as a direct expression of the metaphysical will, which is the power and the creative force behind life and nature. Music for him precedes and eludes concepts, strongly affecting us inwardly with its powerful expressive influence. Nietzsche took up these ideas in his first book *The Birth of Greek Tragedy from the Spirit of the Music*. He thought music gave us an insight into the unity of existence which he called the Dionysian, while words and discursive thinking were related to

the world of individuation or what he called the Apollonian. Chris also dealt briefly with Adorno who wrote with intellectual and moral passion about music and culture. He noted that for Alban Berg, Schoenberg's student, atonality continually slipped back to the tonal register.

Charles Rosen's influential work *The Classical Style* analysed seminal works in the Western classical music tradition based on musical form and cultural context, a method which Chris compared to the US New Criticism and the earlier work of William Empson. By contrast Chris suggested that French musical theory among thinkers such as Pierre Boulez, associated with a group around the *avant-garde* literary journal *Tel Quel*, represented a more systematic application of Saussurean linguistic analysis and Chomskian transformational grammar to musical form.

There was a felt need to go beyond formalism in literary criticism from the late '60s on. There was the same move in music criticism led by Joseph Kerman who started out with strong formalist leanings but then fell under the influence of developments in French and US speculative literary theory. Kerman wanted musical writing which remained alert to structural details but which at the same time established a relationship with post-Kantian continental philosophy.

The 1960s saw the rise of post-Structuralism, Derrida having challenged structuralism in 1967, not with poetic free-wheeling hermeneutics, but with a highly analytical view alert to structure but also making broader connections to philosophy. This was the start of Deconstruction in literary criticism and music theory. This led to Deconstructive Musicology in the 1980s to 1990s. The movement criticized what it saw as a Eurocentrism based on a conception of organic form taken from Hegel, both of which



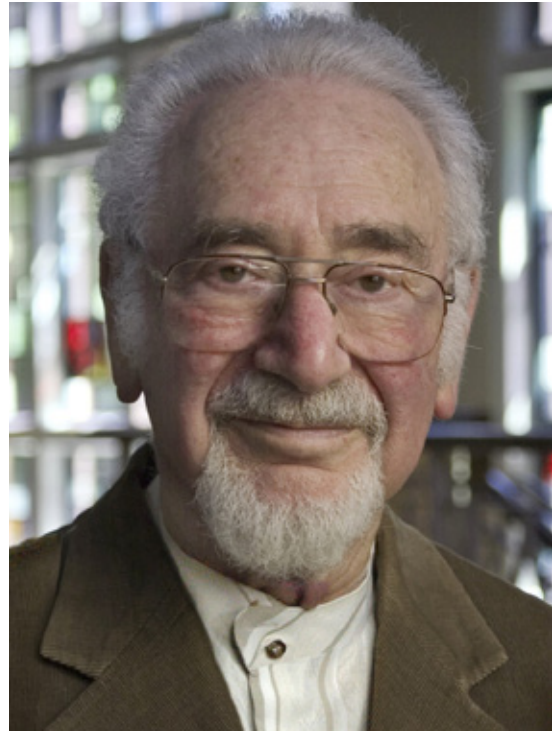


**Deryck Cooke**

deconstructionists regarded as based on tacit cultural assumptions. Alan Street and Jonathan Dunsby differed in terms of their analysis of late Brahms piano pieces and the idea of the organic. Dunsby thought there is a structural unity to these pieces, but Street regarded such analysis as ideologically suspect, and maintained that it was based on unrealistic assessments of the ability of the average listener to discern musical detail and form. However ‘deconstructive musicology’ had its own problems.

There was the objection that large-scale analogical transfer of thinking from the verbal or textual to musical ‘languages’ does harm to musical experience. Kerman pointed out that there is a plurality of approaches to traditional musicology and analysis but, in the end, it is musical criticism that is needed. This became more speculative and philosophically oriented. At this stage there was a turn to cognitive psychology. Fodor started a debate around ‘the modular mind’, which was syntactic, semantic etc. But is musical experience inter-modular or ‘cognitively permeable’? Fodor modified his theory later on. Musical understanding seems to be influenced by many factors and is not an isolated part of the human mind. But are these factors a help to or a distraction from the experiential reality of music?

There was a controversy about ‘musical language’. What do we mean by this? One of the older books on this topic was Deryck Cooke’s *The Language*



**Joseph Kerman**

*of Music* (1958) which argues that tonal language develops in many ways, and that music can be analysed in its melodic-harmonic form and structure. It also expresses emotions and can be interpreted according to its expressive aspect and through structural analysis. But can his argument stand up against the evidence of widespread and deep intercultural differences in structures of musical/tonal response or languages? The point was to emphasise variety rather than cultural Eurocentrism. Lawrence Kramer’s self-confirming musical metaphysics privileges certain musical languages, cultures and traditions.

Chris then concluded that music criticism in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century ran the risk of becoming too powerful for its own good. However, some participants raised questions about the non-expert reception of music. Is all this thinking about music needed for the enjoyment of it? It was pointed out that music is about feelings and has a visceral impact on the listener. It was also mentioned that religious feelings were channelled into music and perhaps metaphysical theories are more convincing than an interpretation of music based on literary theory. Music is both a craft and a form of emotional expression. Chris Norris answered these criticisms and pointed out that musical thinking has a discursive aspect as well as a feeling aspect and he insisted that there is, or should be, no sharp distinction between analysis and enjoyment.

## When the Mode of the Music Changes

### *Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 24<sup>th</sup> March.*

In a second talk on the theme of music and philosophy, Eric Longley gave us a good presentation on the relationship between ‘radical philosophy’ and music. The title of the talk was: ‘When the Mode of the Music Changes the Walls of the Citadel Shake’. His point of reference is Karl Marx, and the further development of his ideas by Theodor Adorno. Adorno worked on music in the 1930s. He also wrote on what he called *The Culture Industry*.

Eric draw attention to Marx’s thesis of the relationship between culture, as part of the superstructure (relations of production), and the material forces (mode of production). Marx wrote:

‘In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life processes in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.’

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The emphasis here is on the word ‘correspond’. Culture is not connected to the material base in a crude deterministic way but in a much looser way of corresponding. This allows a degree of freedom for cultural production in art, literature and music and stands in opposition both to a liberal standpoint that sees culture as completely independent, and crude social realism that sees culture fully determined by the social base.

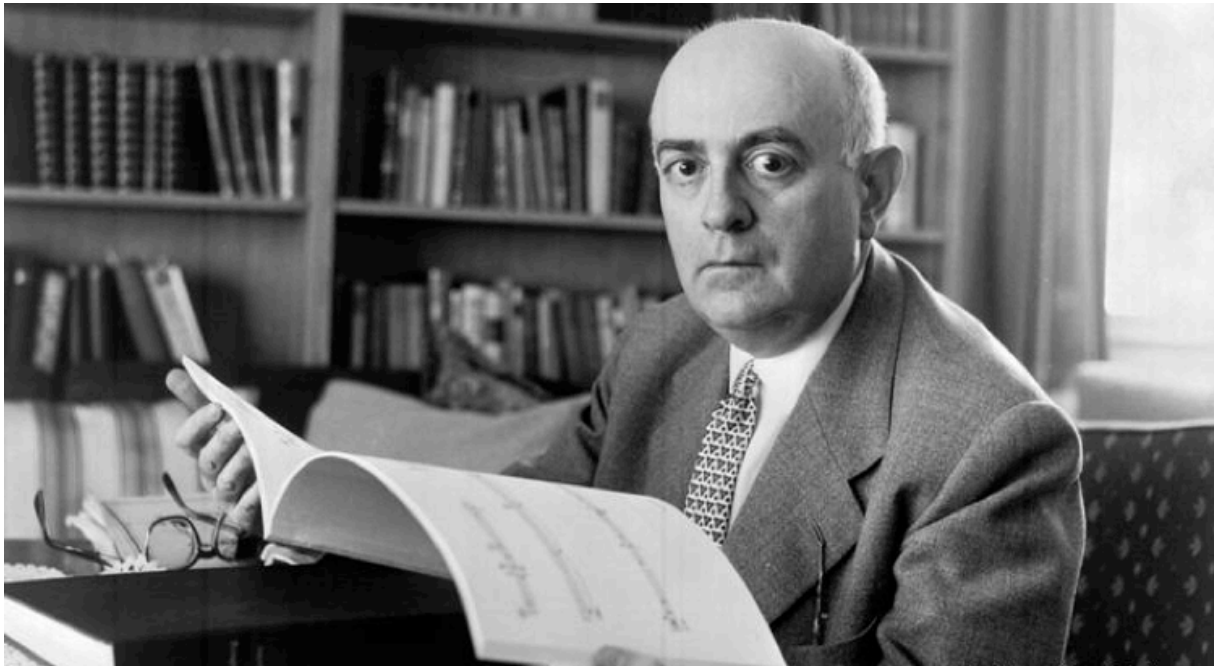
Adorno developed this idea of correspondence, by taking art to be critical of society. He wrote that we: ‘should not ask how music functions but how music stands in relation to underlying antinomies in society, whether music confronts them, overcomes them, leaves them as they are or indeed hides them. Only an immanent question concerned with the form of works will lead to this’. However, Adorno was criticised by Eric for his degrading of popular music, Jazz in particular, and for discarding content. Adorno thought content does not matter. Eric thought it does.

Eric also talked about production, distribution and reception in the music industry. He followed the story from the early recording technology in the industrial age, to distribution in the form of Vinyl which has now been replaced by streaming, and reception which went from live to record to stream to virtual concert.

He also dealt with the content of popular music and ended with two controversial conclusions. One is that music, like philosophy in its Hegelian conception, arrives after the battle so that the Owl of Minerva flies at dusk. The other conclusion is that the global economic system, characterised by Capitalism, is so dominating that no one is free, even the birds are chained to the sky. He gave the example of punk music. Eric said: ‘The contradiction of punk music was that it drew support for an anti-establishment stance whilst promoting stronger support for the new right-wing government and was in that sense acting as Mrs Thatcher’s shock troops. Capitalism recoument is the antidote to threats’.

Eric then turned to the state of painting in Britain between 1768 and 1848 to focus on changes in the way art was produced to meet the demands of the patrons and buyers. This is the period from the opening of the Royal Academy to the Pre-Raphaelite movement. He gave examples





### Adorno

from the works of Reynolds, Gainsborough, Constable, Arkwright and Turner. He showed the changes in style and content which were a response to industrialization and the demand for new subjects for paintings.

Eric then came back to Adorno to discuss his view of Instrumental Reason and its relation to art. For Adorno ‘reason’ is the instrument of control and it leads to evil and tragedies. This may be the case with discursive knowledge in science and philosophy, but is art in the same predicament? A more detailed answer is needed.

The other issue that Eric discussed in relation to Adorno is that of the ‘relation between the artwork and its social and historical context - the work’s structure, as socially and historically mediated content – is the nexus of Adorno’s interpretative method.’ It concerns the relationship of the inner structural relations of the work and its outer social relations within which it functions. Adorno gave more details in terms of the situation in music and its development when he wrote: ‘Intra-musical tensions are the unconscious phenomena of social tensions’. Adorno also said that: ‘The shock that accompanied the new artistic movements immediately before the war is the expression of the fact that the break between production and consumption became radical; that for this reason art no longer had the

task of representing a reality that is pre-existing for everyone in common, but rather revealing, in its isolation, the very cracks that reality would like to cover over in order to exist in safety; and that, in doing so, it repels reality’.

But, as Eric pointed out, the problem is working this out in detail. It also means that we distinguish between the work of the philosopher and the music critic. Besides all this, Adorno needs to show why reality is fractured. Why is it the case and why should it continue like this? Perhaps it is part of Adorno’s pessimism about reason.

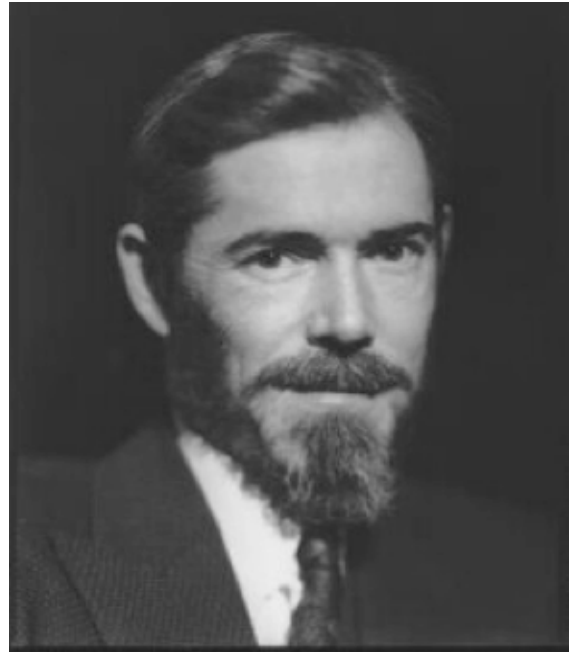
The talk found mixed reactions from the audience. For example, is art forward looking and open to the future? How could it help political change? It was suggested by one participant that art connects with our intuition of what is coming and helps bring it about, while another participant saw the task of music to be to take us to a different place beyond the contingency of emotions, a spiritual dimension.

Eric replied to these questions by saying that art is not about politics, but it discloses the world. Music, in particular, is a formal art. It has emotional input. But music also connects with society and promotes political movements towards change.

## Primacy of Action: The 'I do's Have It

### *Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 10<sup>th</sup> March.*

What is the starting point of modern philosophy and what are the consequences? The starting point was the priority of theoretical reason over practical reason, or the privileging of epistemology over ethics and actions. This has been the position since Descartes. However, a few philosophers have objected to this trend of thought because of the problems this position gave rise to. One philosopher who challenged the primacy of theoretical reason is John Macmurray (1891-1976). He suggested that primacy should be given to action or practical reason. Jeanne Warren explained and defended his view in a very interesting talk to *The Wednesday* group. The talk was interactive in nature, with extracts chosen from Macmurray's book *The Self as Agent*, followed by comments by Jeanne after each extract or couple of extracts and then a discussion with the participants, before moving on.



Macmurray

Jeanne started with the Cogito (I think, therefore, I am) and Descartes' identification of the 'I' with a thinking substance. The cogito was a conclusion of a systematic process of doubt. Jeanne commented that: 'The requirement to doubt may be a helpful guide for thinking, but it cannot be the foundation because it ignores the role of belief in knowledge. The thinker has beliefs to start with and will have beliefs at the end of the process of thought.' She was echoing Macmurray who said: 'We must reject this, both as standpoint and as method. If this be philosophy, then philosophy is a bubble floating in an atmosphere of unreality. Belief – not theoretical assent – is a necessary element in knowledge.' Jeanne said that her definition of knowledge is not that it is a true belief, but that it is '*what we believe with justification to be true*'.

This has practical implications, since in acting, we act on beliefs. It seems that Descartes' quest for certainty has created two contexts, a theoretical context where knowledge is emphasised and a practical context where belief is the basis of action. This duality, in Macmurray's opinion, should be rejected. Jeanne supported Macmurray's position and added the objection that this also 'creates

the unicorn of the disembodied intellect which alone is capable of discovering the highest truth.' Furthermore, Jeanne added that 'since action includes thinking but thinking does not include action, giving primacy to the theoretical (thinking) entails dualism, whereas giving primacy to the practical (action) does not.' Both Jeanne and Macmurray invoked Kant who 'rightly concluded, it is the practical that is primary. The theoretical is secondary and derivative.'

It is for all these reasons that Macmurray rejects the dualism of the theoretical standpoint and concludes that: 'What is here proposed is that we should substitute the 'I do' for the 'I think' as our starting-point and centre of reference; and do our thinking from the standpoint of action'. But how do we know that this is possible? Macmurray says that 'can only be discovered in the attempt. For any reasoned objection to its possibility would presuppose the primacy of the theoretical'. In his next book *Persons in Relation*, Macmurray follows the implication of the standpoint of action for freedom and human society. This, hopefully, will be another topic for another Wednesday

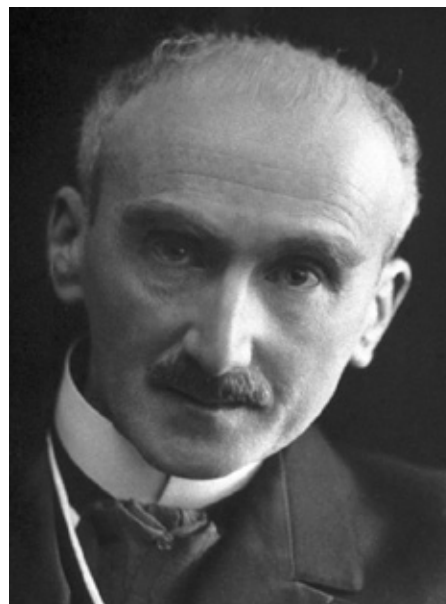
# Bergson's Idea of Intuition

## *Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 17<sup>th</sup> March.*

Analytical philosophy has sidelined the French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859 - 1941) but according to Keith Ansell-Pearson, Bergson is having a comeback at the moment. Bertrand Russell (1872 - 1970) criticized Bergson severely in his book *Mysticism and Logic* (1918). The difference between the two philosophers can be reduced to one idea. Bergson favored intuition over intelligence (with some qualification) while Russell thought that intelligence, or conceptual thinking, came first. Both philosophers were trained in mathematics and intuition plays a role in mathematics as does analysis.

In a remarkable talk by Elizabeth Pask, *The Wednesday* group was introduced to the idea of intuition in Bergson's thought. Bergson proposed the idea of intuition to correct the positivist trend in French philosophy. But he didn't reject science. However, from the perspective of life - how we live our lives - Bergson thought we need intuition: openness to the flow of life, which he termed 'duration' is qualitatively different from the linear, measurable time of the clocks we use to fix our movements or train timetables. It is the constant flow of internal life, or consciousness. We are aware of measurable time, but there is also an internal feel for time where past, present and the anticipation of future are all connected in a duration. Memory plays a role here and Bergson differentiates between habitual and involuntary memory. Habitual memory is one that is stored in our nervous system. It consists of learnt conceptual and behavioral patterns. Involuntary memory is connected with the flow of internal life. This idea had a major influence on the trend of 'stream of consciousness' literature in early 20<sup>th</sup> century novels.

Bergson thought that behind both intuition and intelligence is a life force he called *Élan Vital*. It is a creative force. Bergson's ontology is one of constant change, evolution, spontaneity and contingency, together with emphasis on the particular and individual. The *Élan Vital* is what gives us a sense of unity with life in general. In Bergson's own words 'by an expansion of consciousness and the



**Henri Bergson**

sympathetic communication established with the rest of the living, it introduces us to life's reciprocal inter-penetration and endlessly continuous creation. But though intuition transcends intelligence, it is intelligence that has given the push to make it rise.' So Bergson does not think that intuition is mystical and he doesn't reject conceptual thinking, but he thinks that such thinking does not do justice to human life and we need the quality of life provided by intuition. He also wanted to move from a philosophy of contemplation into a philosophy of action, and intuition is important for our actions.

Elizabeth gave her presentation a personal touch by describing a visit to a house in France and taking an interest in the flow of time in the building and the objects left in it, including an exercise book from the 1930s. She also provided photos that illustrated our feelings for nature and the seasons. Bergson thought that our consciousness engages with the natural scene as a whole and not particular aspects of it.

The Linguistic Turn and the rise of Analytical philosophy pushed aside non-conceptual ideas such as Bergson's intuition. Perhaps now is the time to re-think intuition and its value for philosophy and life.



## Talking to Yourself

Is talking to yourself a sign of incipient madness? Consider the diaries of Dr Johnson's biographer, James Boswell, in which he often slips out of the first person when he's anxious: an effect that's comical and touching. 'Yesterday you was pretty well', reads his entry for 4 April 1764. 'But confused and changed and desperate. After dinner, you said to Rose, "I have passed a very disagreeable winter of it, with little enjoyment". You was truly splenetic. You said to him after, "When I recollect, 'twas not so". You *are* imbecile.' I've always thought of Boswell as the most deeply human of writers. But now I shall forever think of him as deeply sane, too: a pioneer of mind control as well as of biography.

Rachel Cooke, *The Guardian*, 10th Jan 2021



CHRIS NORRIS

Truth is I have these moments when the 'I'  
Goes slippery, starts to come apart from 'me',  
Upbraids me, calls me fool or imbecile,  
Has me switch pronouns, think myself insane.

Always that fear: disorders of the brain,  
How they can seize the wisest man, reveal  
His secret griefs or torments, and decree  
His judgments merest folly – what reply?

My master, the great Doctor, source of my  
Far smaller claim to wisdom – even he,  
As I perceived, was lately prone to feel  
The verbal slippages, the psychic strain.

Though dignity required he not complain  
I witnessed it, his struggle to conceal  
How deep the conflict, how heartfelt the plea  
That this dark cloud not spread to fill his sky.

Some vocal perturbation might belie  
His lofty tone, some subtle shift of key  
Betray the demon following close at heel  
To whisper 'wasted wisdom, words in vain'.

Else it's black melancholy, Burton's bane,  
That nightly breaks him on the conscience-wheel  
Of work undone, all those great projects we  
Talked much of as the months and years went by.



Dr. Johnson

They'd say 'The man's marvel: who'll deny  
His scholarship, his scope, his industry,  
His peerless prose, and above all his zeal  
To judge as truth and charity ordain?'

Yet I, his acolyte, have heard him feign  
That magisterial tone, heard his appeal  
That Dr Johnson set Sam Johnson free  
To track the demons, thwart the evil eye,

But greet the pronoun-shifters, not defy  
Those inner voices whose rough harmony  
Insists his public self submit to deal  
With them, give up its eminent domain.

Myself, I used to worry, think again  
Of those bewildering moments, think how real  
Those shrewd sub-vocalisers seemed to be  
As words slipped loose from that first-person tie.

Yet now at last the answer strikes me: why  
Have this thing down as mere anomaly,  
Some freak condition they could make a meal  
Of in their latest plain-intent campaign?

'You was' – so I address myself and rein  
The slippage in for form's sake yet, with keel  
Thus evened, think 'where any two or three  
Are gathered . . . ', till the voices multiply

And I (you) soon join forces to decry  
The old concordat that insists 'agree  
Amongst yourselves, then all consent to kneel  
Before King Self and own his single reign'.

For that requires the myriad-minded train  
In single-minded ways, demands they seal  
Their thoughts against intruders, aim to see  
Nay-sayers off, and seek to overfly

The patch of turbulence that sends awry  
Their plan to quell the restless repartee  
Of I and me whose banter bids to steal  
A frisky march on their august refrain.



**Boswell**



**Dr. Johnson**





‘Superstrings’ – mixed media on canvas (40cm x 60 cm)

## Thoughts on Superstring Theory

Dr ALAN XUEREB

All those who know me a little know of my fascination with physics. One of the most exciting scientific adventures of all time is the search for the ultimate nature of physical reality, a hunt that in the past century has

yielded such breakthroughs as Einstein’s theory of relativity and quantum mechanics, two theories that radically altered our picture of space, time, gravity, and the fundamental building blocks of matter. Superstring



theory is an attempt to explain all of the particles and fundamental forces of nature in one theory by modelling them as vibrations of tiny supersymmetric strings.

'Superstring theory' is a shorthand for supersymmetric string theory because unlike bosonic string theory, it is the version of string theory that accounts for both fermions and bosons and incorporates supersymmetry to model gravity.

Since the second superstring revolution, the five superstring theories are regarded as different limits of a single theory tentatively called M-theory. Superstring theory is based on supersymmetry. No supersymmetric particles have been discovered and recent research at LHC and Tevatron has excluded some of the possibilities. Our physical space is observed to have three large spatial dimensions and, along with time, is a boundless 4-dimensional continuum known as spacetime. However, nothing prevents a theory from including more than 4 dimensions. In the case of string theory, consistency requires spacetime to have 10 dimensions (3D regular space + 1 time + 6D hyperspace). Professor S. James Gates actually describes these superstrings as the DNA of reality, which I think is a marvellous and creative way of looking at it.

This is perhaps the first painting of its kind in my collection. One need not know a lot of physics and mathematics to appreciate the repercussions of this theory on philosophy. As Dr Richard Dawid says we are witnessing strong signs of a novel fertile interdependence between contemporary fundamental physics and the philosophy of science. At a time when both fields feel the need to transcend their traditional frameworks their rapprochement comes at hand. From physics to metaphysics!

**Personal note:** My wife Silke loves this painting. So much so that even though I was putting it up for sale for charity at an exhibition held a few years back at the European Court of Justice, she promptly bought it back.

## *The Wednesday*

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## With Gratitude



Each of us is a 'self-unseeing',  
'Looking away' as Hardy said,  
Time is the essence of our Being,  
Pointing to what lies ahead.

True we can survey the past,  
Distorting it in fabulous stories,  
But in itself, uncharted, vast,  
It buries unknown shames and glories.

We cannot alter what is gone,  
Little to come is in our power,  
Our passions shape what's coming on,  
The destiny that is their dower.

We are the stream: it does not bear us,  
Where our part ends we cannot guess,  
What it will give, what it will spare us  
Of life's delight and life's distress.

Today we share the self same eddy,  
Another will usurp our place,  
For destiny is never steady,  
Its hidden causes hard to trace,

Still in our space here, let Time spare  
A portion of its endless store,  
It is with gratitude I share  
What, sadly, soon will be no more.

My pessimism you reproach  
For you have greater strength than I,  
You'd turn a wheelchair to a coach,  
And wrench the thunder from the sky.

But, never sanguine, I must see  
Things as they are, though for a spell,  
Held by the love you brought to me,  
I dream that all things might be well.

*Edward Greenwood*

