

The Wednesday

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Editorial

Future-Oriented Philosophy

Borrowing the title of Whitehead's book *Adventures of Ideas*, I wonder: How did this adventure start and where it is leading? This is a big question and one can only speculate. I suggest that it all started by looking for an idea. Perhaps the absolute, in the form of one constitutive element of the universe which then subsequently turned into a search for the highest good, happiness and the examined life. All this suggests a beginning, but also an end. Alternatively, it was the endeavour of reason to unfold itself into nature and society and to search for a consummation of this endeavour in a future state of affairs when reason will have come to a completion. This allows us to look in both directions, towards the past when reason unfolded and to the future when reason comes to a completion.

But this alternative picture was shattered in the 19th century with the arrival of a new generation of philosophers, starting with Feuerbach and his little book *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*. The old optimism of harmony and identity was challenged. Philosophy was accused of justifying theology and the alternative was a future philosophy that would be anthropological. The body was also introduced into philosophy and sensuality was to embody thought, or become the source of thought, rather than being a challenge to it. We are now familiar with this picture through phenomenology and the presence of the body in philosophy.

The critique of abstract thought that has been mounted by anthropological ideas and the embodied thinkers has moved philosophy into the social sphere and life in general. Philosophy has become practical and put in opposition to state and society. The philosopher has then been invited to challenge both or turn into something else, not a real philosopher but a 'scholar' as Nietzsche accused Kant and other philosophers of being. Philosophy of the future by was now seen as intentionally

'harmful' to the opinions surrounding it. Nietzsche, when talking about the Greek philosophers, in *The Gay Science*, Section 328, said: 'beginning with Socrates, these thinkers never wearied of preaching: "Your thoughtlessness and stupidity, the way you live according to the rule, your submission to your neighbour's opinion is the reason why you so rarely achieve happiness; we thinkers, as thinkers, are the happiest of all."'

But Nietzsche himself was not quite sure of this idea and he quickly qualified it by saying: 'What is certain, however, is that it deprived stupidity of its good conscience; these philosophers harmed stupidity.' The justification of philosophy became its ability to annoy and harm. Nietzsche in 'Schopenhauer as Educator' (the third of his *Untimely Meditations*), relates the instructive anecdote about what Diogenes said when someone praised a philosopher in his presence, 'How can he be regarded great, since he has been a philosopher for so long and has never yet disturbed anybody?' Nietzsche added sarcastically: 'That, indeed, ought to be the epitaph of university philosophy: "it disturbed nobody"'.

These are some moves towards a philosophy of the future but they seem for the most part outdated. It is fair to say that philosophy turned into anthropology and into a critique. But a critique is also related to the past and the present. A philosophy of the future should be grounded in possibilities that are to come and states of affairs that we can, with Deleuze, call 'virtual'. Maybe one can ground such possibilities in thought and language, or in the very essence of being as an ontology of becoming as has been expressed in process philosophies, such as Bloch's and Whitehead's. But can these philosophies fulfil their promises? This is a question that needs further assessment.

The Editor

Thomas Hobbes As Man And As Political Philosopher

The article below looks at the life and thought of Thomas Hobbes and gives a short analysis of his major book *Leviathan*.

EDWARD GREENWOOD

It is notorious that detailed biographical information is lacking about many famous figures in the Tudor and Stuart period. In Hobbes's case we are fortunate to have a 25 page portrait in the *Brief Lives* of his friend and fellow Wiltshireman John Aubrey. We are also fortunate in that Aubrey asked Hobbes to write an autobiography. Hobbes obliged with a poem of 365 lines in Latin elegiac couplets. There is also a useful modern biographical account in Richard Tuck's excellent *Thomas Hobbes* in the Past Master series. From Aubrey we have several wonderful anecdotes. Hobbes was born in 1588 and died in 1679 at the age of 90. His father was a drunken parson, but Hobbes was taught Ancient Greek in the private school of a young Robert Latimer just down from university. Hobbes was so good at Greek that he translated the whole of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* in 1629. He regarded the realistic Thucydides as 'the most politic historian that ever wrote'. He also translated Euripides' powerful tragedy *Medea*.

The young Hobbes met and conversed with Francis Bacon, the empiricist. Hobbes himself served as tutor to the son of the Cavendish family, the Earls of Devonshire, although their main seat was at Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire. He was more of a companion as his pupil was only three years younger. Twice Hobbes took a Cavendish on the Grand Tour to Italy. In 1610 he went to Venice and met Sarpi whose realistic politics he admired. From 1634 to 1639 he was in Florence where he met his admired Galileo whom the Inquisition had put under house arrest for his heliocentric views. From Aubrey we learn Hobbes was handsome, six feet tall, loved playing tennis into his seventies, enjoyed singing when no one was in earshot and had a love affair when he was ninety with a young girl Mary to whom he wrote a love poem which Aubrey prints. Tension between King Charles the First and his parliament grew from 1640 to 1642

when the civil war started. Hobbes took the side of the King. Unlike the later Whig historians Hobbes held the view that the King was defending the ancient constitution and Parliament violating it. In 1640 he brought out *The Elements of Law* probably designed as a brief for the Cavendishes and other Royalists. It was a Cavendish who commanded the king's cavalry at the battle of Marston Moor in Yorkshire in 1644, a Royalist defeat. Hobbes began to fear prosecution by parliament and fled to France in 1640. He did not return until 1651 when he made his peace with parliament and Cromwell.

It is Aubrey who tells us that Hobbes did not look into Euclid until he was forty and then was completely enraptured by the absolute certainty of geometrical knowledge. As he said later it contrasts here with politics, an area in which the passions are involved. It is this which makes us sceptical about the mathematical form in which Spinoza cast his *Ethics*. In Spinoza's defence we must recognise it is true that in the rationalist seventeenth century there was no distinction between analytic or a-priori and synthetic or empirical reasoning. We owe that distinction to Hume and especially Kant.

Aubrey also tells us that Hobbes used to set down his ideas in a notebook when he was out walking so the thoughts would not be lost, a practice Nietzsche later adopted. It is from Aubrey that we get the delightful and revealing story of Hobbes and the beggar in the Strand. When Hobbes gave him some money a friend asked him if he would have done so had it not been Christ's command. Hobbes replied: 'I was in pain to consider the miserable condition of the old man; and now my almes, giving him some relief, doth also ease me.' I say this is revealing because we see that Hobbes shows us that moral actions can be purely human and so do not need divine command. This was also the view of Plato in the *Euthyphro*. The anecdote



Hobbes

also brings out that the charge of being an ethical egoist so often levelled against Hobbes by superficial commentators is quite unjust. His ethics fully allows for compassion and altruism. He is a tautological egoist in the sense that he thinks that we always do what we want to do. Will for him is just our last appetite. (*Leviathan* part one chapter six). In fact he anticipates Collingwood's view that the egoism/ altruism antithesis is not an either/or. An action can be both at once.

Hobbes's verse autobiography begins with the witty conceit that because he was born in April 1588 he and fear were engendered together. In *Leviathan* part one chapter 15 he writes: 'That which gives to human Actions the relish of Justice, is a certain Nobleness or Galantesse of courage, (rarely found,) by which a man scorns to be beholding for the contentment of his life, to fraud, or breach of promise.' In part one chapter 13 Hobbes uses the term 'diffidence' for fear. This fear arises from our lack of faith or trust in our fellow humans, our vulnerability. Elsewhere Hobbes cites our locking of our doors at night as a proof of this diffidence.

An Analysis Of Leviathan

Hobbes's method in politics was not, as some have supposed derived from the so-called 'resolutivo-compositivo' method of Galileo whereby the thing to be explained is reductively reduced to its elements. As Richard Tuck and Quentin Skinner have emphasised Hobbes was primarily influenced by the humanist interest in rhetoric and history. He was contemptuous of Aristotle's physics and metaphysics, as were many of his contemporaries, but in his analysis of the passions he was deeply influenced by book two of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* of which he made a digest in English.

The name 'Leviathan', the whale, or sea monster, is of course taken from the *Book of Job* chapter 41. On the frontispiece engraving, which has been carefully analysed by Quentin Skinner in his book *From Humanism to Hobbes*, we see a gigantic human form with a secular sword and an ecclesiastical mitre. When we look closely we see that this man monster is made up of lots of little men. These are the citizens who have made a covenant or pact of agreement to set up the body they constitute, the body which, as sovereign, is their representative ,

**The battle of Marston Moor
in Yorkshire in 1644**



to protect them from each other's possible depredations. In this paradoxical way Hobbes gives us the sovereignty of the people.

Under the image on our left are the forts and arms representing the sovereign's secular power and on the right ecclesiastical regalia and a conclave of clergy. Hobbes was one of those who were called Erastians after bishop Erastus. There was to be no division of power between the secular and the religious authorities. Hobbes believed church controversy had been one of the main causes of the civil war. He blamed the clerics for this, the ecclesiastical authorities were to be entirely subordinate to the secular sovereign.

Leviathan is divided into four books with an introduction. Part one deals with the nature of man. It is a combination of what we call today psychology and sociology. The second part tells us how by covenant or agreement the state with its sovereign power is created. The third part is an account of the Christian state. The fourth part is a lively attack on the Papacy's claims over the secular authorities. In nearly four hundred pages more than a half are devoted to religion. This is a measure of the supreme importance of religion then as compared with today. Oxford students of politics were not required to read the last two books and I shall not deal with them here.

Hobbes is a thorough materialist. There is nothing

in the universe which is not body. There is no separable soul. He is in short a monist like Spinoza, not a dualist like Descartes. Hobbes sees our knowledge of the world as mediated by the senses. Here under the influence of the physics and optics of the time he sets English philosophy on the disastrous course of what we might call empirical idealism in that he believes all we know are our own ideas. Grass is not green it only appears to be so. He compounds this by identifying thought itself with the movement of particles in the brain. In this he anticipates the absurd view of some modern neuroscientists that they can through the scanner actually see our thoughts. Hobbes mistakenly thought that imagination is decaying sense, whereas it is a cogitative faculty.

Things look up in chapter 3. He has a fine description of the quickness of transitions in thought. This is good phenomenology. But he points out that, as well as what later came to be known as the stream of consciousness, (the idea is found in William James's *Principles of Psychology*) we also have guided reasoning about cause and effect as well as mathematical reckoning. We are loquacious animals and chapter five anticipates much twentieth century philosophy in showing the dangers of this misuse of language.

In chapter six he sees us as ruled by our appetites and aversions. He thinks a thing is good because we think it is and not that we think it is because it



Wiltshireman John Aubrey



Francis Bacon

is good. This, however, may not be as subjectivist as it sounds as he assumes reasonable persons will come to a consensus on what is good. Hobbes, like Spinoza after him, is a determinist. He is like Spinoza also in seeing self-affirmation and self-preservation as primary concerns.

In part two we have the essence of Hobbes's political philosophy. In chapter seventeen he outlines the social contract which I have already described. The sovereign Hobbes proposes will be benevolent, not a tyrant. As Hobbes puts it, 'paternal' not 'despotic'. The nature of his power is described in chapter twenty one. A kind of welfare state is envisaged in which the sovereign sees that no one is indigent. But if the sovereign loses the power to protect us our allegiance is abrogated, and we must compound with the sovereign who can. Hobbes himself did when he returned to Cromwell's England. This aroused criticism in many Royalists, including his friend Edward Hyde Earl of Clarendon, another fellow Wiltshireman.

I will conclude by considering the complex issue of Hobbes and religion. As many Christians at the time had been strongly influenced by the dualistic

view ultimately stemming from Plato that the body and soul were two separate entities with the soul surviving at death, they assumed that a monistic materialist such as Hobbes was an atheist. But as Shirley Letwin and others pointed out many early Christians believed not in the immortality of the soul, but the resurrection of the body. At the second coming Christ would return and establish not some spiritual heaven but a material kingdom on earth. Hobbes subscribed to what was then called the mortalist heresy, as also did Milton. When we die, we lose consciousness, but we regain it when Christ comes back and resurrects our bodies, presumably renewed in some way. Hobbes thought this was compatible with being a good Church of England man though many others did not. Aubrey, however, denies that Hobbes was an atheist and tells us that he received the sacraments from an Anglican churchman at his deathbed.

It is interesting to compare Hobbes's materialism with that of his admirer Spinoza. Spinoza too could claim that he was not an atheist, but his idea that the material world is actually identical with the totality of things was not one to which Hobbes seems to me to subscribe.

Timeless

**Listen to the wind
when it chases through cities and open
land
with unheard messages**

**wander unhindered, let your hair flutter
like the migrating swallows
think:**

**timeless
gently
southeast
precipitation**

**watch the mist rise in the forest
learn about the falling leaves
like someone holding a shell to their ear
to hear the ocean
recall a lost girl
with a red hood looking for ways out
say:**

**short lived
violent
sudden
gusts of wind**

**wait as time goes by
when everything fades
snowflakes are falling
the silences
isolated birdcalls
hoar frost
remember:**

**endless
frozen
icy
change**

**recognize everything that leans
follow the beats of your heart's wings
and sing the song of taking a breath
again and again**



Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Reports of The Wednesday Meetings Held During April 2021

Schopenhauer's World of Pessimism

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 7th April.

Written by RAHIM HASSAN

The Wednesday meeting was treated to an in-depth analysis of the world according to Schopenhauer. What distinguishes Schopenhauer's world is that it is pessimistic, and this pessimism is built on a metaphysical theory. The core idea is that we exist and survive as the result of a blind will that keeps us striving all the time causing us pain and misery. The question then is whether there is an escape from this irrational will and whether philosophy, religion and art could help in this endeavour. Jane O'Grady gave us a rare insight into Schopenhauer's view of the will, suffering and redemption.

Jane started her talk by pointing out that philosophers have their own worlds, and their worlds depend on their characters. But this puts Schopenhauer in a bad light from the start because he was a loner, missed his dead father and hated his mother, held repugnant personal views and ended up as an embittered old man. However, Schopenhauer is a major figure in Continental philosophy and a well-known writer. He has thoughts which are worth engaging with, such as his view of the world as will and representation, his view of the genius, the value of art, his downgrading of consciousness and his emphasis on the body, and his determinism. He influenced the philosophers Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, as well as a number of poets and novelists.



Schopenhauer

What Schopenhauer inherited from Kant, and Plato, is that the world is not what it seems. It is just an appearance or representation. This appearance is for the self that represents the world. But there is another aspect to the world and that is of the world in itself. Kant said that we can't know what the world is in itself, but Schopenhauer said we can. For him the world in itself is what we find in ourselves when we will, our reality is willing, and the whole of reality or world is a will.

The Will (with a capital letter) is a metaphysical force that congeals into individual items in the world, including ourselves. This is a Will to Life. It promotes life through a continuous striving and it aims at sacrificing the individual but maintaining the species. It has the capacity to propagate itself by reproduction in humans and nature in general. The Will also continuously sets up targets and drives individuals to their destruction and suffering. If the individual reaches his target, after a struggle, he then feels bored and moves on to another target. If he doesn't reach his target, he will feel miserable and he may try again. If he succeeds this time, he will feel bored and search for another cycle of striving, with the same subsequent result of either boredom or another suffering.

But is there a way out of the control of the Will? Schopenhauer thinks 'yes', if we can figure out the nature of the world and the Will that is driving it. We can escape it through the act of contemplation of the Ideas and the way to get there is through art.

Questions were raised in the discussion about the consistency of all this. Reference was made in particular to music. Schopenhauer thinks that music is a copy of the Will, yet he recommends art as a way out of the control of the Will. There were other issues such as free-will and suicide - Schopenhauer denied we have free will and did not support suicide.

What is a conspiracy theory?

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 14th April.

Report written by JOHN HOLROYD

In my lecture to *The Wednesday* meeting about conspiracy theories I addressed three questions. First, I looked at the vexed question of what is a conspiracy theory? Second, I considered the question: how can we best evaluate the claims made by conspiracy theories? And third, we looked at new conspiricism and asked: how is new conspiricism different from ‘old conspiricism’?

The question ‘What is a conspiracy theory?’ is problematic to begin with because, while there is much consensus in the answers offered, there is also some significant disagreement too. Within popular discourse a conspiracy theory is, by its very nature, often thought to be unlikely. By contrast, a number of philosophers have argued that conspiracy theories should not be defined in this way. Brian Keeley, for example, argues that we should distinguish between warranted and unwarranted conspiracy theories, and thereby avoid the danger of summarily dismissing something as a conspiracy theory merely by the mechanism of its definition.

We looked briefly at a couple of definitions of conspiracy theories such as David Coady’s ‘an explanation that is opposed to the official explanation’ and Joseph Uscinski’s ‘the essence of conspiratorial thinking revolves around the notion that powerful groups covertly control events against the common good.’ This led us on to our second question about how to best evaluate conspiracy theories. Here we looked at whether or not a conspiracy theory is self-consistent and how far a conspiracy theory is explanatory. We also considered whether or not and how far a conspiracy theory is adjusted when faced with falsifications. In particular we noted that conspiracy theories are inconsistent if they set a higher bar with respect to their own falsification compared with the falsifications they allege against established theories and explanations.

It was important to mention the phenomenon of conspiracy complexes that call for ‘epistemic paradigm shifts’ or epistemic revolutions. Such manoeuvres call into question an entire established discourse, say the practice of medicine, science or history. They can enframe the conversation in terms of an archaeology of knowledge and claim that the foundations of knowledge are based purely on power interests and that as such



Hanna Arendt

what we take to be knowledge is a mere fabrication. We noted how such perspectives can arise from legitimate concerns such as that history is often written by the victors in conflicts. But we also noted how problematic this kind of epistemic revolution is to bring about in a rationally successful way. Calling into question aspects of scientific method is one thing, upending the entire procedure and then replacing it with an alternative that is more rationally compelling is quite another.

Finally, we looked at new conspiricism that is not so much concerned to replace what it takes to be false with what it alleges to be true, but is instead more of a disruptor, aimed at putting forward a multiverse of alternative facts. We noted how such a political stratagem can be deeply disorienting and injurious to the operation of democracy and how important truth is in a realist sense as indicated by Hannah Arendt in her essay *Truth and Politics*. All the same, new conspiricism is a fact of the digital age. It needs to be combated through education in critical thinking, the law and through a much greater enfranchisement of alienated elements within society.

There was a lively discussion in which we examined the difficulties involved in defining conspiracy theories, noting the ill intent of some such theories such as holocaust denial. We did not explore the very important question of the popularity of some conspiracy theories and the social psychology that is at work there. These are important questions for another day.

The 12-Step Program Revisited

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 21st April.

Report written by PAUL COCKBURN

We had a discussion of ‘The 12-Step Recovery Program’ in our Wednesday meeting two years ago. We decided to revisit this program again and a member of our group led the discussion. This process started with an organization called Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) in 1935 in the USA. Unlike previous programs which tried to cure alcoholism, it focused on the idea of groups of alcoholics helping each other not merely to stop drinking, but to stay stopped. The approach was formulated as a series of 12 Steps which each alcoholic could undertake with the support and advice of other group members to make radical changes to their habits and behaviour.

We went through the first six steps in this meeting. The first step is for the addict to admit their powerlessness over the addiction. This first step generated a lot of discussion because recovery seems to be related to powerfulness not to its opposite. One way of getting power is by seeking support from group solidarity or from a spiritual force passing through the group.

The causes of addiction are not rational, in the sense that it is clear to the sufferer they have a severe problem, but they cannot do something about it in a rational and decisive way and escape the harm they are doing to themselves and others. So, rational argument is not the solution.

If someone comes to AA or other Twelve-

Step fellowships, then they are acknowledging something is wrong. There must be a mismatch between their ‘true’ values and their behaviour. Hence, it is necessary to create a list of what they really value and to be able to hold on to these values.

What is the reason for addictive and destructive behavior? It could be genetic, in our genes, or it could in some cases be because of damage inflicted on someone by another person such as a caregiver. In this latter case the damaged person can resent the person who ‘injured’ them, but this resentment means the injured person does see that they have been wronged. But the key is not to be ‘warped’ by this experience, the victim can see their true core values are in fact the opposite of what they have experienced from the person who has harmed them. It does not help to blame others for our faults, we should try to stand by our core values. We should strive to turn every negative we experience into its opposite, from bad into good.

In the case of sexual addiction, this is often addiction to pornography, and it can show the addict is averse in some way to intimacy and intimate healthy relationships. Seeking healthy contact with others may correct this behavior. It is very rare for the 12 step plan to be carried out by someone on their own. There is usually a ‘sponsor’ or other confidant the addict is helped and counseled by, and the meetings involve testimony and the sharing of experiences. The group effect can be powerful as the ‘message’ is shared and help is conveyed to addicts from those who have recovered from their addictions.

In the discussion, one member referred to Nietzsche’s idea of self-mastery in his book *Daybreak*, II, Section 109 ‘Self-mastery and moderation and their ultimate motive’ as an alternative program of dealing with drives and their addictions. We may have another opportunity of discussing this on a different occasion.



Creativity and the Ontology of Not-Yet Being

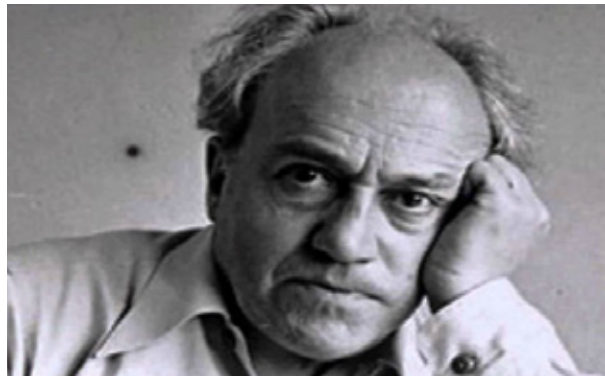
Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 28th April.

Report written by RAHIM HASSAN

Creativity is a great challenge to philosophy. Classical philosophy did not have a conception of the new. Revealed religions introduced the idea of *creatio ex nihilo*. But if the religious point of view is not adapted many questions arise. What is it that creates? What is created? Where is creativity going? Is it a free process or a determined activity? There are many answers to these questions, but for this meeting we turned to the philosophy of Ernst Bloch. We were pleased to invite Johan Siebers to talk about Creativity and the Ontology of Not-Yet Being, as it was developed in the philosophy of Ernst Bloch. Johan has been working on interpreting and developing it for decades.

The ontology of not-yet being is a central element in the philosophy of Ernst Bloch (1885–1977). What Bloch meant by it is ‘the aspects of being that exhibit a tendency for change, which is not random but has a certain direction’. However, the goal of the process of the birth of the new is not a determined telos but it is created in the unfolding of the process itself. This has implication for language since ‘we cannot speak in a “finished” language of an unfinished world’. It is also a challenge to the philosophical tradition since this tradition insists on clarity and logical precision. To talk about a not-yet being seems to some philosophers vague and contradictory. But conceptual language which aims at clarity comes too late so to speak because it puts the relation to the real under static abstract categories.

Bloch sets us questions about thinking, its starting point and its direction. Thinking starts with amazement and perplexity that create an opening into the question of being. These opening questions may show a negative capability of thought to conceptualise the new. Bloch develops a conceptual scheme involving three interdependent concepts: the front, the new, and the ultimate. Johan said these ‘replace traditional modal ontological notions. The front of the process is the point of transgression in any given development where a



Ernst Bloch

space of real possibility opens up that is distinct from the mere continuation of chains of causality. The new is the materially new, the creation of something that was not there before. The ultimate is the reference to the unbegun that has not entered into process but functions as source and goal at the same time. Another term that Bloch uses for it is *identity*. I take it that ‘identity’ is another name for the old term ‘the absolute’. Johan said ‘the new exists only as the repeated attempt at identity, at the ultimate, and the ultimate exists as the groundless emergence of the new’. The repeated attempt is an anticipatory hope. Johan said that in hope there is transgression, there is genuine newness, and there is an orientation on the ultimate.

Moving with Bloch beyond Bloch, Johan concluded, ‘would make explicit the conception of creativity that is implicit within his ontology, we obtain a perspective on a radically transformed language for philosophy, in which the split between what can be said and the unsayable, direct intuition, and discursive thought, nothingness, and reality can be overcome.’ There were more aspects to Johan’s paper and another meeting was scheduled in June to further discuss the topic.

Johan Siebers is Director of the Ernst Bloch Centre for German Thought at the Institute of Modern Languages Research, University of London, and Associate Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Middlesex University London.

Bad Language

How intimately sex and language are intertwined can be seen by reading pornography in a foreign language. The most recondite expressions for the indecent, knowledge of which no school, no parental home, no literary experience transmits, are understood instinctively, just as in childhood the most tangential utterances and observations concerning the sexual crystallize into a true representation.

T.W. Adorno, 'On parle français', in *Minima Moralia*



CHRIS NORRIS

So far they go beneath, beyond, behind
Our language-territories, so far below
The furthest down we logothetes can go,
That some 'indecencies' may bring to mind
A proto-speech where both are intertwined,
The truth of things no grown-up can bestow
On childish guesswork and the inchoate flow
Of sound caught up in passion's need to find
That wordless truth. Here we approach the zone
Of indistinction, off all language-maps,
Where strangest things seem intimately known,
Though barely grasped, and instinct fills the gaps
With errant speculations of its own
Or beasts let loose by adult language-scrap.

A lexis of a sort, a word-hoard drawn
From sources past remembrance, roots thrust deep
And far back into realms of fretful sleep
As chthonic beings copulate and spawn
Those etymonsters prowling through the porn-
Filled Badlands. Hear their moans of pleasure seep
Through every usage-code set up to keep
Our words secure since that dream-troubled dawn
When speech first stirred! Perhaps it tells you why
The schoolyard, like the bedroom, may resound
To words whose sense no change of native sky
Makes strange, whose import seems to get around
By sheer contagion, and whose sources lie
In psychic realms to no one language bound.

Try reading porn in languages you're not
At home with and you'll see: it comes across,
The import of those words, perhaps with loss
Of certain nuances but catching what
They mean to natives, how they hit the spot
Where sound and sense let eros win the toss
And so convey, without translator's gloss,
The gist that made their utterance feel hot
Off some uncensored press. They crystallize,
Those meanings, out of all the long repressed
Desires and fears that sex-talk signifies,
From phallic rivalry to mother's breast,
As if each sense-sonority took rise
From things long latent, now made manifest.

Just listen as the words we call 'obscene',
'Indecent', or plain 'vulgar' bid us lend
A depth-attentive ear, not seek to fend
The demons off or 'keep the language clean'
But sense that what our sayings have us mean
By words is often not what we intend
As child or adult, much less comprehend
In others' words, but something we may glean,
If lucky, on the sly. The children twig
There's adult chat involved, pick up the hint
Of matters 'not for your ears', but still dig
For hidden gold until they catch a glint
Of what's perhaps iron pyrites yet big
With that X-rated stuff if viewed asquint.

Don't think we grown-ups must have come out well
Beyond such childish fancies, fit to draw
A clear-cut line and not the shortest straw,
The one by which their words contrive to tell
A different tale: of senses that rebel,
Of words that conjure feelings of mixed awe
And fear or guilt, transgressions that the law
Of adulthood desires yet strives to quell.
They seek us out, those sounds no sooner heard
Than seized on, code unknown, a primal speech
Yet, like the mystic's 'word within a word'
Made flesh by Rabelais, with power to reach
Some elemental part of us unstirred
By all that codes and usage have to teach.



Authority and Art

PAUL COCKBURN

What is the source of authority in society? Is there some sort of social contract which allows governments to act on behalf of the people? What is the source of the authority and power of the state? Authority goes wider than this – our lives are highly influenced by what society and the family consider to be acceptable behavior. Do social habits become ingrained in us so that they seem to carry authority? The concept of authority has many psychological and sociological overtones. Our literature and art contain many stories which relate to how authority or the lack of it can have interesting and illuminating consequences. Two famous stories and a film are considered below: what light do they shed on authority and the source of authority in society?

The Admirable Crichton is a fascinating play

(later made into an excellent film starring Kenneth More) written by J M Barrie in 1902 questioning the British class system. Crichton is the butler to the Earl of Loam, a British peer. The peer's family and servants are shipwrecked on a deserted tropical island, where the resourceful Crichton, with his practical knowledge, becomes the leader of the new island community.

The aristocrats accept him as leader, and after some time he is about to marry the peer's daughter on the island when a ship appears to rescue them. Crichton promptly dresses in his old butler's uniform and resumes his status as the butler. When they get back to England, the story of Crichton's leadership is covered up, and Crichton leaves his job as a butler. Crichton himself we learn believes the class system is the natural outcome of a civilized society!



The Admirable Crichton

The play shows our social class, including whether we become a leader or not, can be determined by our birth. It is no accident that two of the last three Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom both went to Eton and Oxford. However, if the societal constraints are removed, as they were on the tropical island, then there is the possibility of a better adapted new leader emerging more fitted to the new environment who has perhaps a 'natural' authority.

Another dimension linked to social class and relevant to authority is education. The book *Lord of the Flies*, also made into a film, written by William Golding is another story which sheds light on authority. Again, it involves a tropical island. An aeroplane crashes on an island in the Pacific during a war. The only survivors are boys who were being evacuated. In the absence of adults, the boys' behavior deteriorates. They develop paranoid beliefs about the island. The majority of the boys are idle, and the initial leader of the boys, Ralph, is challenged by another boy called Jack. Tribal war breaks out. In the end Jack sets fire to the island in order to corner and kill Ralph, and the fire attracts a passing ship. The adult officer on the ship lands on the island and rescues the boys, but is appalled at their behavior. He expresses his disappointment on the feral, warlike behavior the boys exhibit, as he looks out to his war-ship at anchor in the bay of the island.

Golding paints a terrifying picture of what could happen when a group of children are marooned, and have no adults exercising authority over them. The authority that parents and teachers exercise over children is crucial to their development. Of course, children can still flout that authority.

The film *If* (1968) directed by Lindsay Anderson satirizes a public school where the boys take action against their teachers and parents on Founders Day in a violent and savage insurrection, breaking into the armoury of the Combined Cadet Force and using the guns to shoot staff and parents. It was of course made at the same time as the 1968 student riots in Paris!

It is interesting how stories add to the debate by considering situations where there is a dimension missing - in the case of *Crichton* they are free of English customs on the tropical island, and in the case of *Lord of the Flies* there are no adults to try and control the children.

The Wednesday

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Leviathan

— — — — —
The people's monster downloads everyone's will.
Decides what is best for him - therefore them.
He says he will protect them from the enemy;
as long as they obey him of course.
The enemy is anyone who wants to disagree with him,
or his need to snatch everything from them.

There is of course, the supreme direction of the general will;
each of us a fixed piece of the whole. Still the adored leader slips in,
to take charge, reminding us of our fear of freedom.

Self-interest is a cheap fuel, pumped into our tanks.
It's what he says must be used to drive along his route
and get to where he wants us to go.
The high cost of compassion may blind us,
to the needs of humanity.

David Burridge

