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Editorial

Truth On A Cosmic Scale

I received a couple of responses to the editorial in the last issue of *The Wednesday*. The reader will find one of them published inside this issue. The other is summed up in these two lines: 'It is an interesting idea that philosophy is just a giant *Glass Bead Game*. I know what you mean but feel that you are bowing to the pressure of post-modernism and don't in your heart really believe this'.

My response is that the two concepts. *The Glass Bead Game* and post-modernism need some explanation. I will start by explaining and summarising *The Glass Bead Game*. It is a novel by Herman Hesse about an austere order of intellectuals who created a highly developed game. This game aims at uniting all knowledge into one big scheme. It is made up of music, mathematics, philosophy, the I Ching, and other components. The game has been developed over a long time, with every great master adding important moves to the game. We find scattered throughout the novel references to German philosophy since Leibniz, with a particular reference to Novalis, the German Romantic poet and philosopher who worked on an encyclopaedia to synthesise all knowledge.

The point of mentioning this game in the last editorial was that philosophy itself can be seen as one game with many moves and concepts that have been designed by great figures in its history. However, my position is close to that of Hegel who sees philosophy as an Idea that starts from and aims at an absolute truth, a truth that reflects itself in so many guises and works itself up to completeness in reaching a final truth. But this for me is a regulative idea or an ideal, a striving after truth that may not be reachable. Here I part company with Hegel. To use the language of *The Game*, I would say that the game may not be finalised even in the long run. But this is not to say that there is no truth or that philosophy is relativising all truth.

Post-modernism, on the other hand, has been a powerful movement since the 1970s, mainly in literature at first, but soon moving into social science and philosophy, especially in France and then in the United States. Patricia Waugh in her introduction to *Post-Modernism: A Reader* characterises this movement as 'a pervasive loss of faith in the progressivist and speculative discourses of modernity'. In this respect, it is 'a thorough-going critique of the assumptions of the Enlightenment or the discourses of modernity and their foundation in notions of universal reason'. It calls for the end of 'grand narratives' and for a plurality of discourses. The concern now is with 'embodied particularity' as Waugh put it or 'context-specific consensus'. Hence, post-modernism became the battleground for feminists, minorities and other affected groups.

This was radicalised by philosophers such as Rorty who criticised the notion of truth which he considered to be a relic from a religious, metaphysical era. Truth, in a post-Nietzschean world, becomes 'a provisional fiction'. It is a pragmatic matter that can be reached through consensus and not a metaphysical entity. But with the dismissal of truth, the very possibility of philosophy becomes questionable, and philosophy turns into literature.

Rorty's challenge to philosophy is a powerful one. It is well thought out and well defended. But what I said above about *The Game*, also applies to post-modernism. I am not abandoning truth in the metaphysical sense, but I disagree with limiting the perspectives on truth to a particular view or to one method (i.e. philosophy, art or religion). Much as I find the idea of immanence a very attractive idea that has a diversity of implications, politically, socially and intellectually, I am still holding on to a notion of transcendence. This is a larger conception that allows for a unity in the conception of philosophy rather than the fragmented, aesthetic conception of a post-modern world. John D. Caputo suggests in *Truth* that 'the most ancient quality of philosophy, its provenance in wonder, will be repeated on a cosmic scale.' Perhaps, if we wish to defend the possibility of philosophy we need such a dimension and scale.

The Editor

Indeterminacy: For and Against

Is there really such a thing as indeterminacy or whether causal determinism works all the way down?

PETER STIBRANY

As an engineer, I made a living applying causal determinism. It was my job to control all the causal factors within any machine I was designing. Indeterminacy came up principally in the context of failure. It's how we would model the failure of a supplier to deliver a component, the failure of the component to operate, and so on. It was a way to model the unknown.

But one activity got me wondering about whether indeterminacy was real, and that was when we did failure analysis. Identifying the root cause of a system failure frequently turned on the question of when to stop looking. And, in practice, it turned out we always stopped at one of two termini, both of which are indeterminacies: randomness and choice.

Here's a made-up example: Let's say we are in a restaurant, enjoying a wonderful meal, when we hear the crash of breaking glass. A diner has apparently swept his drink off the table, and the glass shattered. Imagine the restaurant is owned by a very wealthy, exceedingly compulsive person who demands an investigation into how this happened and brings us in to do the analysis.

A glass swept of the table: determinism or ideterminacy?

We proceed by comparing what happened with what was expected to happen. This approach gives the client actionable results and a feeling of satisfaction that the matter is understood, while restricting the analysis. There is only a limited number of things expected, after all.

For example: perhaps when replenishing a glass, the server was expected to place it considering the diner's sweeping gestures. Or, perhaps the glass was expected to be shatterproof. The analysis then turns to why the situation did not conform to expectations.

In the first case, did the server choose to not follow procedure? Or did they forget, or were they distracted just at the critical time? The cause is thereby traced either to choice or to randomness.

In the second case, was the glass purchased cut-price by a crooked purchasing manager from a supplier that did not meet specifications? That would be choice. Or was it the one glass in a million that was faulty and that slipped through the manufacturer's testing regime? That would be randomness.

Causality tracing ends in randomness or choice because anything that happens just the expected way, that is to say, deterministically, is not of interest. We don't say: 'The cause of the glass hitting the floor was that a fraction of a second earlier, it was just above the floor accelerating downward'. In the Rube Goldberg machine that is real life, we look for things that were otherwise than our deterministic model predicted.

After I retired, I got to wondering whether there really is such a thing as indeterminacy or does causal determinacy work all the way down.

A Rube Goldberg Machine

Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR)

The dominant presence in this question is that of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR), as promulgated by Leibniz: *'... by virtue of which we consider that we can find no true or existent fact, no true assertion, without there being a sufficient reason why it is thus and not otherwise, although most of the time these reasons cannot be known to us'.*

It was initially unclear whether the PSR applied only to judgements or also to changes in material objects, to causal determinism, in other words. It seems that for a long time, these two were confounded. Not least by Leibniz, who is most associated with the PSR.

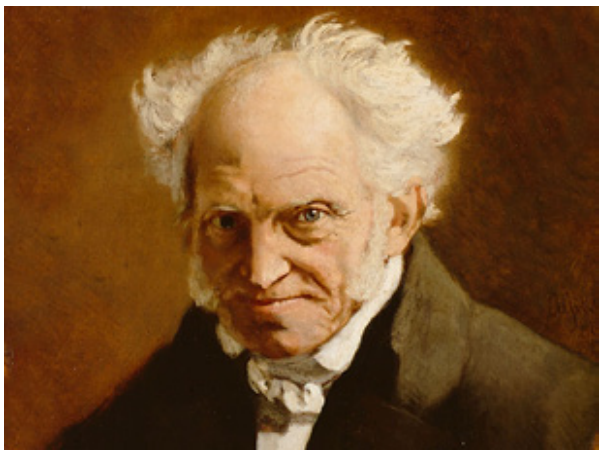
But in his 1813 PhD dissertation, *The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, Arthur Schopenhauer pointed out the PSR is founded on relations which: *'... on closer inspection ... separate into ... four, according to the four classes into which everything that can become an object for us—that is to say, all our representations—may be divided'.*

He identified these as:

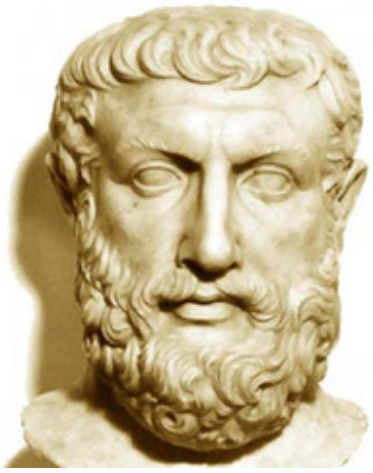
- Empirical - "Becoming" - connected to causal determinism
- Conceptual - "Knowing" - related to judgement, logic, reason, and truth
- Formal - "Being" - connected to *a priori* intuitions that enable us to think at all
- Interior - The Will - for which Schopenhauer formulated the Law of Motives

To clarify what he meant by Will, Schopenhauer referenced the Upanishads: '*It is not to be seen: it sees; and it is not to be heard, it hears; it is not to be known, it knows; it is not to be understood, it understands. Beyond that seeing, knowing, hearing, and understanding is nothing else'.* The Will was governed by motives.

Just when I was convinced that Schopenhauer was a determinist, he slipped away. Here's a quote (emphasis added): *'[W]e are compelled to assume that these four laws ... must necessarily*



Schopenhauer



Parmenides

spring from one and the same ***original quality of our whole cognitive faculty*** *as their common root, which we should accordingly have to look upon as the innermost germ of all dependence, relativeness,* ***instability and limitation of the objects of our consciousness*** *...'.*

From what I can see, he is not saying the PSR necessarily holds. He is saying that in whatever way it does not hold, that way would escape our cognitive faculty.

Indeed, Schopenhauer argued that there could be no proof of the PSR because you'd need to presuppose the PSR true for the process to make sense: *'Now if we require a proof of it, or, in other words, a demonstration of its reason, we thereby already assume it to be true, nay, we found our demand precisely upon that assumption, and thus we find ourselves involved in the circle of exacting a proof of our right to exact a proof'.*

Others have attempted to prove the PSR, typically using empirical arguments. But these arguments don't strike me as very solid.

Bad Arguments for PSR

The *common experience* argument goes like this: The world is intelligible; ergo, everything has a sufficient reason to be what it is. Bricks don't show up in mid-air *ex-nihilo*. Neither does anything else. True, but unexpected things other than bricks do happen all the time. We explain these as accidental, firm in the faith that if we investigated them carefully, we would find sufficient reasons for them. But this argument makes PSR our assumption, not our conclusion. In any case, just because the world is somewhat intelligible does not mean we can understand it completely or accurately.

Next is the argument that *scientific investigation*, our heavy hitter for understanding the natural world, presupposes PSR. That's true. But just because science presupposes PSR does not mean it will not end up bending or abandoning that principle.

As a counterpoint, I'd ask: have you seen the state of physics lately? It's already unintelligible to most human beings. Cutting-edge theories are pushing this envelope very hard indeed. Kant reckoned that concepts without intuitions are blind. It seems that physicists are replacing intuitions with observations and experiments and positing concepts for which we have no intuitions. So, they might blow right through causal determinism without the rest of us even noticing.

Next comes an appeal to the apparent *reliability of our cognitive faculties.* The argument asserts that if the PSR were false, our faculties would be unreliable. But they are not unreliable, ergo PSR.

I question the plausibility of the assertion that our cognitive faculties are reliable. We sustain the illusion of competence because our thinking is rarely challenged. When it counts, such as in engineering, we always assume fallibility. We treat anything we deduce or infer that we don't also test as provisional.

And finally, there is the *logical catastrophe argument*, which says that if PSR were false, nothing would make sense, not even rationality. We've already seen the idea that you can't prove the PSR rationally. The same goes for disproving it. We would be using logic to defeat itself, asking it to shave itself as well as all the cognitive tools that did not shave themselves, as it were. But just because we can reason reliably in terms of, say, geometry, does not mean we can do so about natural phenomena. The empirical and the logical appear to coincide in our daily lives, but there is no guarantee that they will do so for all of nature. Catastrophising the issue is not a valid argument.

The best perspective I've come across that argues for the Principle of Sufficient Reason roots back to Parmenides. He reckoned everything was one thing without change. And, I'd conjecture that if change is impossible, everything must be determined. Schopenhauer also makes a version of this argument in discussing the empirical root of the PSR. But you'd have to be convinced by Parmenides's basic idea to accept this argument.

I may be coming across as pushing one side of this issue, but I've not seen good arguments *against* PSR either.

Bad Arguments Against PSR

An often-quoted argument against the PSR in the empirical domain is the apparent indeterminacy of quantum mechanics. One might be tempted to think that what happens at that scale is not relevant generally, because quantum phenomena disappear at larger scales. But the cognitive neuroscientist Peter Tse has shown multiple mechanisms for scaling quantum indeterminacy, assuming it exists, to the macroscopic scale in biology. He argues that if reality is indeterminate at the quantum scale, then it's indeterminate at every scale.

The problem with the argument is that quantum mechanics is a deterministic theory. The evolution of the wave equation is not statistical. And multiple deterministic interpretations are being developed to explain why our observations look indeterminate, even though reality is not. In any case, the actual division of interpretations is

Peter Tse

not so much determinism vs indeterminism as realism vs anti-realism. Realists such as Einstein, Schrödinger, and Dirac all thought quantum mechanics incomplete, and they did not see the need to give up on understanding nature using "real" entities interacting in an understandable way.

On the other hand, Nils Bohr reckoned that wave equations are not real and therefore do not collapse. Max Born's statistical treatment is useful to predict the outcomes of experiments, albeit statistically. But the question of indeterminacy is meaningless. That's an interesting thought.

Realists and anti-realists do agree on one thing; quantum mechanics is provisional until it is reconciled with general relativity. Speaking of which, I'd always thought general relativity was a deterministic theory, but no. After referencing some high-end mathematics, the Stanford Encyclopaedia entry on this topic says: *'The simplest way of treating the issue of determinism in GTR would be to state flatly: determinism fails, frequently, and in some of the most interesting models'*. So, as the young people say these days, that's a thing that has been said.

The argument of deterministic vs indeterministic physics ends in a tie - subject to reconciliation of

the two leading theories, each wildly successful in its domain.

Going back to philosophy proper, a circular / *reductio* argument against the PSR credited to Peter van Inwagen goes as follows:

- Let p be the conjunction of all contingent truths
- If p has an explanation, say q, then q will itself be a contingent truth, and hence a conjunct of p
- But then q will end up explaining itself, which is absurd.

But, a contingent truth is one that did not have to be that way. A determinist would say there can be no such thing as a contingent truth; all truths are necessary. So, unless I'm misreading it, the argument assumes the PSR is false to prove the PSR is false.

A determinist can also wave off the idea of *possible worlds*, however useful it is to modal logic, as proving nothing.

Finally, David Hume questioned the idea of causality and therefore also determinism. '*Humeans about laws believe that what laws there are is a matter of what patterns are there to be discerned in the overall mosaic of events that happen in the history of the world. It seems plausible enough that the patterns to be discerned may include not only strict associations (whenever X, Y), but also stable statistical associations'*.

It's true that PSR is not necessarily the case, given the wobbliness of the idea of causation. But this does not argue that strict association, in other words PSR, is necessarily not the case. Hume's view on causality is not miles away from Heraclitus's ideas. And indeed, if the best perspective on the validity of PSR goes back to Parmenides, one might expect Heraclitus might have the best counter. I believe that is the case. But a bit more about science first.

The Scientific Method Finds, and it Hides

Scientists deliberately design their experiments to be blind to one-off events. Experimental results must be replicated to be valid, not just in the same place by the same people, but in different places, at other times and while varying the factors reckoned to be independent. Unrepeatable results are not treated as indeterminacies, but as noise. And experimentalists seek to reduce noise, though they recognise they can't eliminate noise completely.

Interestingly, what is considered noise in one experiment might be signal in another. It depends on theory and instrumentation. Historical examples show up in the study of stars (granulation noise), the operation of radars (ground returns), and aerodynamics (turbulence). But perhaps the most relatable example is from medicine: the placebo effect. When scientists test the effectiveness of treatments, the placebo effect is still considered to be noise.

Here's a quote from the US National Institutes of Health: *'The "gold standard" for testing interventions in people is the "randomised, placebo-controlled" clinical trial, in which volunteers are randomly assigned to a test group receiving the experimental intervention or a control group receiving a placebo (an inactive substance that looks like the drug or treatment being tested). Comparing results from the two groups suggests whether changes in the test group result from the treatment* ***or occur by chance'***. (emphasis added)

As our theories of how the brain works improve and our instruments for probing the brain get more powerful, we can expect the placebo effect to become considered signal rather than noise.

So, will we eventually be able to understand all noise as signal? That's what causal determinism would predict. So far, the answer is no. We can't get rid of all the noise.

A philosopher of science might ask whether, given that we can't seem to be able to get rid of noise, the persistence of determinism is an example of the impossibility of falsifying a theory. Determinists always find ways to modify the relevant theory without dropping determinism. But maybe they are right to stick to their guns. Deterministic theories are extremely useful. Provisionally describing indeterminacy as mathematical randomness makes it formally consistent with determinism, and cloaks it in a certain analytical truthiness. But

invoking randomness as a scientific explanation for one-off events is just another way of saying we have no explanation.

Is Randomness Choice?

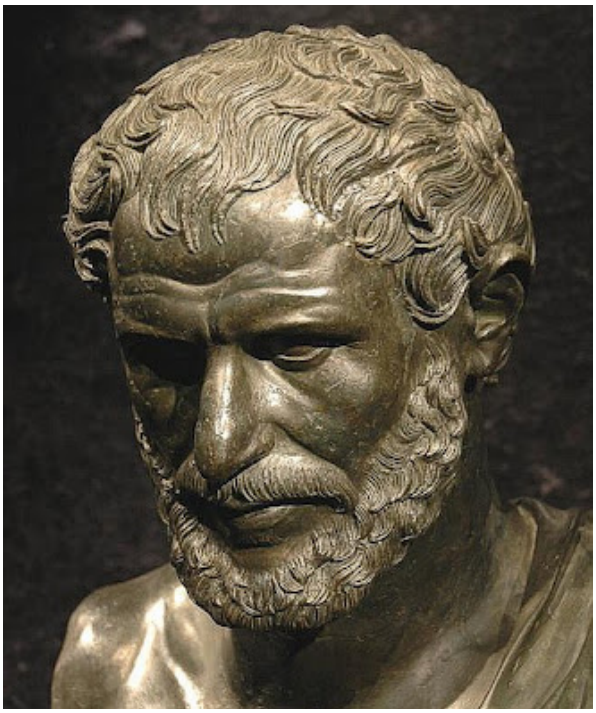
If, for the sake of argument, I accept radical indeterminacy and try to form an intuition about what randomness is, I see it as a kind of choice, albeit a blind choice, made by the universe. This intuition feels like some flavour of animism. Seeing the choice as blind mitigates somewhat this animism but doesn't eliminate it. As to human choice, well, the ability for us to choose between alternatives is a necessary assumption without which we can't live. And it seems to us that our choices are neither random nor determined, indeterminate but not blind.

It's then tempting to ask what guides them. But this would be analogous to asking: 'How does the universe determine the outcome of its random events?' The question destroys itself. If there is genuine indeterminacy down there somewhere in physics, determinists assume it washes out when integrated to the scale of direct human perception. But just as possibly, we could have evolved to harness it somehow, according to the neuroscientist Peter Tse, in any case. So randomness and choice might be related.

Concluding Remarks

Kant reckoned it possible for reality to extend beyond time, space, and causality and beyond the categories of understanding. But if it did so, we would not be able to take it in and understand it. I'm wondering whether indeterminacy is rooted in this regime. To me, this resonates with an idea from ancient times. Parmenides and Heraclitus both reckoned everything is one. And they also agreed that cutting up the one leads to error, whether it's done 'at the joints' as Plato subsequently said, or not.

A thousand years earlier, the Egyptians of the New Kingdom era used the six parts of the wedjat eye hieroglyph, which symbolised the eye of Horus, to represent fractions: the inner corner of the eye stood for 1/2, the pupil for 1/4, the eyebrow for 1/8, the outer corner for 1/16, the curling line for 1/32, and the cheek mark for 1/64. That was



Heraclitus

the mathematical meaning of the pieces. But the eye of Horus was also called the eye of the mind. The five pieces also represented the five senses, and the sixth one represented thought, with some interesting connections to the brain's actual anatomy.

When humans put these pieces together, we only get 63/64ths. Having split the unity, we can't get it back. Not in numbers, and not with our senses and thought.

So, I'd like to go back to Heraclitus for a perspective on indeterminacy. Unlike Parmenides, who argued there could be no change and so gave us a world in which everything is determined, Heraclitus provides the paradox that there is only change. But the flux has structure, *logos*. His river, in which we are never twice, is always different, but still the river.

Maybe randomness and choice, our daily indeterminacies, are like that, simultaneously determined and undetermined, like structure in flux? Is that part of the missing 1/64th?

(This paper was presented in *The Wednesday* meeting 3/8/2022)

Rethinking Conceptual Analysis & The Phenomenology Of 'Dis'

URSULA MARY BLYTHE

This Wednesday talk was an attempt to consider ways of doing contemporary philosophy, such as a post-critical approach which separates 'the political' from the social. I also drew on philosophical texts that discuss 'conceptual engineering' in everyday life. Conceptual engineering (or ameliorative analysis) was coined by Sally Haslanger to analyse conceptual constructs and suggest ways of defining them to address real-life problems. Philosophers use engineered concepts to highlight phenomena that have been overlooked, such as Fricker's (2007) work on epistemic injustice and its related concepts (i.e., testimonial and hermeneutical injustice), which equates to a paradigmatic case of drawing out a fruitful concept. Haslanger's (2000) work on gender and race is another example to advance feminist issues. In some cases, the old concept is so defective; perhaps even contradictory, inaccurate, and immoral, so it is better gone (Chalmers, 2020).

From the perspective of phenomenology, Haslanger's (2004) insights on 'adoption' acknowledge that the topic is personal, as the moral significance of her family is at stake. Despite her subjective experience, Haslanger offers clear and compelling philosophical arguments (Barnes, 2016). One also thinks about the impact of privileged knowledge when reflecting on 'Ableism' and the network of public interventions concerning 'DIS', such as the medical model of disability. Anyone familiar with critical disability studies will be aware that there are different models of 'DIS' - that is, ways of conceptualising and defining what disability means, both descriptively and normatively. These classifications often exclude disabled people or treat them as passive knowers, rather than contributors.

Patriarchal structures also account for the limitations faced by people with 'DIS', resulting from their (individual) differences that defy the normalised body. This ensures that Ableism remains dominant, regardless of increased awareness of accessible practices. Despite the multiplicity of theoretical models, a useful distinction can be made between individual and social dimensions of 'DIS'. Perhaps these factors equate to the personal and collective phenomenology of 'DIS'. Barnes (2016) emphasises

Ursula Mary Blythe

that it is possible to do exceptional philosophy on matters in which you are personally invested, such as the experience of 'DIS'. However, part of the problem in philosophy is that it is dominated by non-disabled theorists who often reiterate the 'medical model', rather than considering the 'lived experience' – that is, a body and person navigating the world.

The aim of my research is to reveal social realities and rethink philosophy as a methodology in disability studies. This philosophical analysis will endeavour to expose the complex entanglement of social norms, human rights, and everyday challenges. I aim to examine the merits and limitations of defining 'DIS' as a model of life experience spanning across different realms, whilst attempting to ring-fence 'the political' to enhance the re-engineering of 'DIS'. In doing so, I endeavour to think of examples and 'thought experiments' to elaborate on the role that concepts play in the life sciences, both in theory and practice, as well as considering the relevant criticisms. My core argument states that: *the conceptual reality of 'Ableism' precedes disability and impacts the phenomenology of 'DIS'*. This was demonstrated through contextualising historic and contemporary 'Ableism', as well as thinking about *which bodies matter?*

I would like to wholeheartedly thank members of the Oxford Wednesday group who provided productive feedback to keep my project on track!

We Stand at a Loss

Loosened in winds,
how returns are always in vain ...
Something rescinds,
as if by a leaving train
we stand at a loss.
Nothing leads back across
our shattering world.
Also, the wall built around
our welcoming ground
now breathes the pain.

Poem and Artwork by
Scharlie Meeuws

Reports of The Wednesday Meetings Held During August 2022

Written by RAHIM **HASSAN**

Hamlet as a Philosophical Tragedy

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 17th August.

The Wednesday weekly talks continued throughout summer as is the case every year. In what follows, I summarise two of the talks. Two others are published in this issue and one more will be published in the next issue.

Edward Greenwood gave a fascinating presentation on 'Hamlet as a Philosophical Tragedy'. In his opinion Hamlet can be considered a philosophical tragedy because it engages with a central question of philosophy since Plato's *Gorgias,* namely 'What ought the character of a man to be and what his pursuits, and how far is he to go, both in mature years and in youth?'

Edward pointed out the mistaken view that Hamlet suffered from the inability to make up his mind. But, as he explained, the postponement of Hamlet's revenge is an attempt by Shakespeare to avoid committing the *hamartia* or tragic mistake. Although Shakespeare allowed this mistake in other plays, the reflective and morally scrupulous Hamlet, unlike any other of Shakespeare's heroes wanted to avoid committing this mistake. 'Macbeth, for example, knew he is doing wrong in murdering his king but, egged on by his formidable wife, did the deed'. Edward also rejected the psychonalitic view of Freud and Jones that Hamlet suffered from Oedipus complex. He saw no evidence for that and pointed out that Shakespeare is a better psychologist than his interpreters.

Edward read Hamlet's soliloquy which is very philosophical and commented on it line by line, starting with the famous thought:

'To be, or not to be, that is the question,'

This raises the question of Being, that Heidegger was interested in. Edward said that it also chimes with the question posed by William James in a famous essay 'Is Life Worth Living?'

Edward explained that Shakespeare is not fatalist. 'There is certainly no so-called poetic justice in that the good are rewarded and the bad punished'. Following Kurt Von Fritz in his book *Tragische Schuld Und Poetische Gerechtigkeit*, we come to know that 'poetic justice, though read into Shakespeare, was completely antithetical to Aristotle's theory of tragedy'. Tragedy is not meant to arouse intellectual judgements of the actions of those involved but rather, as Aristotle shows, the powerful emotions of pity and fear. 'Von Fritz points to the differences between Greek tragedy and Shakespearean tragedy. In Greek tragedy the situation comes from outside the hero and he or she is given a task which arises from the situation rather than from individual psychology. There is of course no question of a hostility to the emotions such as was central to Plato's philosophy and to the Stoics who followed him'.

Edward, following A.C. Bradley, thinks that 'Shakespeare was writing to a secular age and that when he 'speaks of gods or of God, of evil spirits or of Satan, of heaven and of hell, and although the poet may show us ghosts from another world, these ideas do not materially influence his representation of life, nor are they used to throw light on the mystery of its tragedy.' The plays do not reveal what Shakespeare's personal religious beliefs were and we have no biographical evidence from outside them sufficient to establish it.

Charles Peirce and Pragmaticism

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 24th August.

Rob Zinkov presented the third and last of his series of talks on pragmatism to the group. His previous talks covered the pragmatism of Johan Dewey and William James. This time he talked on the pragmatism of Charles Peirce. It was an excellent talk that covered Peirce's life and work. The talk generated an interesting debate.

Pierce was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1839. He became interested in logic during his early years by reading books in his father's library. His father was a professor of astronomy and mathematics at Harvard. He became a scientist and then a lecturer in logic at John Hopkins University. He left teaching after a while and took an interest in farming but fell into debt and died as a poor man.

Charles Sanders Peirce

Rob gave a definition of pragmatism. Pragmatism suggests that the meaning of a word or a concept comes from the actions that the word or the concept leads one to take. The pragmatic maxim as formulated by Peirce is that in every case 'consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object'. The consequence is that there is no need to formally define words. The criterion of understanding a word is the ability to use it in communication and to use it productively. This can be considered Peirce's theory of truth. He said: 'The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real'. Such a view has consequences for later philosophers, such as Rorty. For example, truth does not any longer have a metaphysical, theoretical status. It is made to rely on practical actions. And similarly in the case of ethics. It all relies on the consequent action not on an independent conception of the good.

How different is Pierce's pragmatism from Dewey and James? Peirce is a logician, and he was interested in definitions, meaning and beliefs. They are constructs that must be tested against the evidence. If they fail, they are then considered nonsense. Truth is the outcome of empirical inquiry and not readily available. For James, pragmatism went further and included not only actions but also the consequences of believing in an idea. But Peirce subject such ideas to evidences and reasoning. For Dewey, pragmatism is linked to ideas benefiting to society, progress and freedom.

But why did pragmatism fall out of favour? Rob suggested a number of reasons: Russell's criticism of pragmatism; the cavalier attitude towards truth; the subjective aspect of the theory; and that what is useful to one person may not be useful to another. The rise of Logical Positivism provided much more rigor in argumentation for solving the problems discussed by pragmatists. But most importantly, the emphasis put on reference for understanding words in analytical philosophy shifted attention away from use. However, one might say that the ordinary language argument put the emphasis back on use.

Rob ended his talk by pointing out the attempts to revive pragmatism in the past few decades in what became known as New Pragmatism. Cheryl Misak and others are trying to revive Peirce and Dewey's goals together with placing philosophy on firmer ground. Rob sees in their work an attempt 'to engage in useful meaning-making activities, free of useless abstraction, while maintaining the commitment to truth and objectivity we come to value from other philosophical traditions'.

Primary Idea: Philosophy for Children

LIVIO ROSSETTI

Here are some remarks suggested by your editorial of issue no. 169 of *The Wednesday* magazine. You wrote that 'every master, or great philosopher, adds another significant move in this game'. I would expand your remark, to begin with, by entering the notion of primary ideas. Some Nobel Prize winners were commended because of primary ideas, i.e., because they somehow enlarged our horizons, either by what is known or of what can be done, and also the creators of this or that 'social' forum, just like the Anglo-Iraqi friend of mine who devised *The Wednesday*, have the privilege of having identified and exploited a possibility that previously was totally unknown.

Now this happens also at lower and more familiar levels, for example when you do or say something that for me is moving, or causing a good laugh, or, as it occurred to a correspondent of mine recently, put on the table a dream that makes me dream too. But also, to see a politician that blatantly contradicts himself, or to discover that my partner cheats on me with another person has the power to modify my state of affairs, or at least my perception of what is happening around me. Every significant change has the power to activate a reflection and possibly make me take new (not foreseen, or perhaps impulsive) initiatives or decisions that in turn easily cause further reflections.

Philosophy at an early age

At this point, much depends on my attitude at being reflexive or irreflexive, or perhaps at loving or detesting the opportunity to reconsider certain sections of my personal encyclopaedia, or of my customary behaviour. If the first, I may even presume to be refining my own worldview (my own philosophy); if the second, you may conclude that I remained foreign to philosophy, to my detriment.

Now consider how often educational and social hierarchies, as well as those due to differences in beauty, force, sympathy, age are encourage to look at comparatively disadvantaged people with a sense of superiority, and how often one agrees in deploring the most patent examples of bad taste while exploiting one's own advantageous position without the least perception of latent contradiction. Not few teachers, for instance, tend to absorb the idea that they have nothing to learn from their pupils. A notable consequence seems to follow there are two types of philosophies and philosophers, one is for virtual communities of learned adults who are on average doing well, and another for the rest of the population.

You went close to these thoughts when writing, toward the end of your fine editorial, that 'Philosophy is no more than different accounts constructed to help us to cope with life. In this sense, it is not different from, but complements other narratives in art and religion'. However, even when dealing with art and religion, it often happens to focus only on the above-mentioned communities of learned adults and presume to have nothing to say with reference to the rest of the world.

So, shouldn't we all take more than one step towards the rest-of-the-world? Just consider how great is the difference between the so-called philosophy for children going back to Matthew Lipman (with a whole set of textbooks and a complex rituality for the 'initiation' of pupils to philosophy) and for instance 'Amica Sofia' in Italy (with a journal, *Amica Sofia*, established in 2007), whose leading idea is that pupils (and babies, and teenagers etc.) are already thinking people, and just need to be offered repeated opportunities (stretches of time) to get together quietly, pay attention to something, and organize their thoughts. Isn't it that, when philosophy is meant to be *for* children, patent authoritarian features surface?

Lady in Front of a Mirror, 1838,
Ferdinand von Lütgendorff - Leinburg

Lady at her Mirror

(Rilke, trans. Chris Norris)

CHRIS **NORRIS**

As one who leaves the spices to diffuse
Themselves in her choice sleeping-draught, so she,
A little tired, lets her own mirror see
It siphoned off, that smiling face she views.

She waits awhile to have the flow increase
And show her hair, unfastened, join the rush
For nullity, until its remnants brush
Her shoulders, yet untouched, a perfect piece

Of fleshly marble, all beneath still clad
In evening wear. Unsure, as if to try
Conclusions, she drinks slowly what one mad

For love of her would gorge on; then her maid
Is called to clear the mirror's floor – goodbye
To lights, to furniture, and nightly shade.

'Meaningful Interconnectedness'
-Mixed media -
bas-relief on canvas
(30 x 60cm)

Being as Interconnectedness of Everything

Dr. ALAN XUEREB

The essence of each of us is consciousness. Everything you ever experience is your own consciousness. Various optical illusions as well as virtual reality illustrate that we are sensing our own interpretation of what is 'there' all the time. Not only do we not see 'the real world', but it is not even clear that such a thing exists. Indeed, as Nick Bostrom suggests we could actually be living in a very advanced simulation. Nevertheless, as David Chalmers says, it would not make a huge difference to the meaning of our lives:

'If it turns out we live in a simulation, that's really interesting. That might be shocking, but after a while, life would go back to normal, maybe with a few changes. But basically, we could still continue our lives. We could still continue our relationships. We could still be continuing our activities. If it turns out that we're in a perfect simulation, then some people say that would mean, "Oh, my God, all this is meaningless; all this is an illusion." That's the view I want to combat. I want to say, "No, even if we're in a perfect simulation, this is not an illusion; I'm still in a perfectly real world; the conversation I'm having with you right now is a perfectly real conversation. Everything is just as meaningful as it was before."'

This idea of 'essence' is essential (all puns intended) to understand Heidegger's quest for *Dasein* (Being) and it is often expressed in philosophical works as οὐσία (ousia). The term οὐσία is an Ancient Greek noun,

formed on the feminine present participle of the verb εἰμί, eimí, meaning 'to be, I am', so similar grammatically to the English noun 'being'. There was no equivalent grammatical formation in Latin, and it was translated as *essentia* or *substantia*.

Professor Thomas Sheehan in a paper entitled 'What, after all, was Heidegger about?' proposes that the '...final final goal of Heidegger's thinking was not theoretical-philosophical but existentiell-personal'. Heidegger's philosophy was not just about knowing something - getting the answer to a question - no matter how profound that question might be. His philosophy was also and above all a 'protreptic' to self-transformation. Heidegger urged his students, quoting Silesius: *Mensch, werde wesentlich*! 'Become what you essentially are!'. In *Being and Time*, he echoed the same exhortation, this time in the words of Pindar: *Werde, was du bist*! 'Become what you already are!' Again, in 1938 he told his students:

'Over and over we must insist: In the question of "truth" as posed here, what is at stake is not only an alteration in the traditional conception of "truth". Rather, what is at stake is a transformation in man's being'.

As we are told by Professor Thomas Sheehan finally, Heidegger's theoretical path and his protreptic path become one and the same in his work. His single-minded task remained that of explicating existence so as to find its ground, which turns out to be no ground at all but a radical thrown-openness (*der geworfene Entwurf*) that he urges us to embrace and live out of. Presumably then Heidegger did nothing but pursue the command inscribed on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi: γνῶθι σεαυτόν, 'Know yourself' – which he glossed as 'The question of existence is clarified only by ex-isting.'

Sheehan believes that the key to understand Heidegger's phenomenology is 'meaningfulness'. A sort of making sense of the different fields of interaction of things to Man. Indeed, if one had to go to quantum physics one would think of this reality as a set of interacting fields. Whilst Heidegger probably knew about this, his perception of the human experience was more focussed on the element of 'intelligibility'.

Our *a priori* engagement with intelligibility – as our only way to be – entails, thus, that we are *ipso facto* hermeneutical. We necessarily make some sense of everything we meet, and if we cannot make any sense at all of something, we simply cannot meet it.

Sheehan says that we do not meet things by taking on board dumb sense data; we always encounter things as something or other, where, in traditional language, the 'as-what' and the 'how' point to the meaningful presence (*Anwesen*) of the thing.

The bas-relief I have worked on with patience for a few days expresses this interconnectedness of *Dasein* with its *Anwesen* in the realm of the meaningful (*das Bedeutsame)*. Or, at least, that is what inspired me to produce this work.

The ***Wednesday***

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Old Age Looks Back

The university behind me on the hill-
As I look back, I think of those now dead
I taught with there, whose silent presence still
Accompanies my heavy weary tread.

This is the dubious reward of age,
This backward glance- the young have no such past,
They lack the sense that nothing's here to last,
That dubious consolation of the sage.

I lie down on the grass in the warm sun,
And let the shimmering summer heat enfold,
And think of those whose lives were long since done.

What will my ever shrinking future hold?
Why does recalling times when I was glad
Cause me to feel the present is so sad?

Edward Greenwood

Looking at the University of Kent from St. Thomas Hill with Canterbury Cathedral in the background

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