The *Wednesday*

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Editorial

Different Sentiments

The editorial in last month's issue talked about the different ontological commitments that led to the various ways of looking at philosophy. I will specifically talk about two: one starts from a speculative, metaphysical view and is committed to metaphysics (absolute, self, and freedom), the other takes its stand from a more down-to-earth approach, limited by the bounds of sense, and committed to plurality. In that editorial, I suggested that these commitments are matters of decision, but maybe they reflect psychological and cultural differences. For example, Fichte suggested that the type of philosophy one chooses depends on what type of person one is and the values one places highest. Nietzsche more than a century and a half later said a similar thing.

But it may be the case that there are factors beyond the individual thinker, such as the influence of what I call 'foundational texts', i.e. texts which have authority and influence over successive philosophers in a given tradition. Take for example texts by Spinoza or Leibniz, with their interest in metaphysics, or Descartes preoccupation with the self, or Hobbes, Locke and Hume with their interest in empirical reality. These texts were the sources of different traditions, mainly speculative on the one hand and the empirical on the other.

By speculative philosophy I mean the type of philosophy that looks toward a holistic view of empirical reality, searching for an ultimate unity which has been termed Nature, God or Absolute, by different philosophers. The alternative view is concerned with particulars and assumes these are independent entities and do not need a grounding beyond themselves. This latter view takes science to be its model. The former takes philosophy to be a different enterprise from science, and it looks for the ground of the entities that science takes for granted. From this perspective, different methods and ontological commitments are different responses to the question of the limits of science and philosophical speculation, with Kant standing as a bridge between the two. Leibniz tried to mediate between Descartes and Locke, although his *Monadology* is clearly in the speculative camp.

The other point of contention is utility. The speculative view values philosophy for its attempt at giving a general picture of the world and the place of human beings in it. The empiricist view, following science, sees its value in its practical application. While Kant was searching for a metaphysical foundation for morals, the utilitarians are searching for a happiness mathematically calculated.

Perhaps, we can see the different worldviews, and the different cultures, from Schelling's remark: 'It is absurd to expect the science of beauty in a country that values the Mathematics only as it helps to make Spinning Jennies and & Stocking-weaving machines'. The English might be famous for their manufacturing production methods and profitable efficiency, but where was the poetry in that? Even the term "philosophy" had been sullied by this English fashion for utility – so overused and misapplied that there would undoubtedly be "a Philosophy of Transport and a Philosophy of Cooking"…' (Andrea Wulf: *Magnificent Rebels*, P 289).

Nietzsche echoes this exaggerated remark: 'They are not philosophical these English: Bacon signifies an attack on the philosophical spirit; Hobbes, Hume and Locke a debasement and lowering of the value of the concept of "philosophy" for more than a century. It was against Hume that Kant arose, and rose; it was Locke of whom Schelling said, understandably, "*Je méprise Locke*" (I despise Locke) in their fight against the English mechanistic doltification of the world,…' (*Beyond Good and Evil*, section, 252).

Both judgements above are harsh and unjust but they illustrate two different conceptions of philosophy, its method and its aim. But luckily the world of philosophy moved on from this antagonistic position and cultural differences. However, there is still a gap between the speculative and the empirical approaches. But there is no harm in such divergent views as long as each side does not reject the views of the other out-of-hand, and admits the plurality of approaches to philosophy.

The Editor

SELF REFLECTION

Learning from Paul Ricoeur
Constructing a Self-Narrative and Self-Reflexivity

Self-reflexivity is the path to the fullest possible degree of self-understanding. The experience of self-objectification leads to the highest levels of inner awareness and might be characterised as 'an increase in being'. One central element in the practice of self-reflexivity is the construction of a self-narrative. Paul Ricoeur, in his three volumes of 'Time and Narrative' can act as our guide in this endeavour.

MIKE CHURCHMAN

Drawing on both phenomenology and hermeneutics, Ricoeur homes in on the way narratives are created and nourished by the language of time and the poetics of narrativity. He shows us how we can combine history and fiction in our self-narratives and how to negotiate the aporias of time.

The Aporias of Time

Ricoeur concludes that time is 'an unsurpassable enigma'. A central aporia of time concerns the instant and the present. The time of the present is immeasurably small - so small it can't exist – yet it must exist. Ricoeur tells us this was the subject of enquiry by Husserl who tried to attribute time to a basic level of consciousness, some a priori mechanism that formulates it objectively. Its output is 'longitudinal intentionality' whereby 'protention' (looking forward) works together

with 'retention' (holding in the mind) to create a continuous sense of the present. Our minds seem unable to operate in the present without also being in the past and looking to the future.

To help provide narrative structure, Ricoeur uses an explanatory triad consisting of three types of time, namely cosmic time, calendar or clock time, and 'lived' or phenomenological time. This, he says, is a hierarchy of time. At the highest level cosmic time is what humans first met with when consciousness responded to the daily journey of the sun, the movement of stars in the sky, the patterns of seasons and weather. Late in human history, the time told by shadows turned into calendar and clock times to enable us to co-ordinate. Quite separate to both cosmic and clock times is lived time, which is intensely variable in its effects on the human mind. Ricoeur deepens our understand-

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Reading and self-understanding

ing of all this by explaining how Aristotle's view of time differs from Augustine's.

Aristotle took a scientific approach to time, seeing it as intimately connected with movement in the physical environment. Time is an abstraction enabling us to measure movement: no movement, no time. Change is fast or slow but time itself has no speed. It is movement that creates 'before' and 'after' not anything in our minds. All measurement of time is based on beginnings, endings and, therefore, duration. Aristotle's concept of the instant is that of any one moment in time. His view of the present is that of a 'now' moving along an infinitely long series of instants. By contrast, Augustine's idea of time is one where the present is always with us – 'now' does not move at all. The present is as immobile as the Godhead. He agrees the point-like present is immeasurable, but our lived experience of the present consists of 'intention' (where our immediate attention is concentrated) and 'distention' where our sense of time is stretched out. This is more like phenomenological time, which Ricoeur underscores with another explanatory triad, that of memory, attention and expectation.

This speculation about time continues when we think about the instant, the smallest possible 'now' as both the Same and the Other. It is both continuous and divided. Temporal continuity exists at the same time as temporal discontinuity. With this aporia in the forefront, Ricoeur wants to show us how it can be overcome by bringing our phenomenological consciousness into the objective

time of before and after. He sees equivalences between Aristotle's physical time and Kant's objective time, and Augustine's distended time with Husserl's phenomenological time.

Time can be thought of as a force, like gravity. Narrative helps free us from its constraints. Narrative, says Ricoeur, doesn't resolve any of the aporias of time but puts them to work to enlarge our understanding of our inner temporality. In Volume 2 of 'Time and Narrative' Ricoeur analyses the way time is put to work in Virginia Woolf's 'Mrs Dalloway', Thomas Mann's 'The Magic Mountain' and Marcel Proust's 'In Search of Lost Time'. In different ways these novels interweave cosmic, calendar and lived time making them provide different frameworks for universal, chronological and psychological time scales. The imaginative effect as we read is to allow us to roam freely, sometimes across great spans of time in a small amount of text, and at other times to dwell lengthily on short-lived experiences. The way time is worked on in narrative has significant implications for self-reflexivity. Events in our lives are strongly linked to chronological time but are not frozen in the past. On the contrary, the nature of our unified temporality means these experiences can come back to life and exist in the present to the benefit of our future.

Interpreting Our Personal Histories
In Husserl's system of thought the concept of 'life' is a form of transcendental subjectivity that is the source of all objectification. He uses the concept

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of 'productive life' to describe the systematic and pure interior contemplation of subjectivity. He says: 'As with the unity of a living organism, we can certainly examine and analyse it from the outside, but can understand it only if we go back to its hidden roots'. If we think of our 'hidden roots' as the neural pathways in our brain that are constantly growing and being trimmed like some exotic plant as we mature into unique persons, it becomes obvious that a top priority of self-reflexivity is to grapple with our historicity, our being thrown into particular historical circumstances with our particular genetic inheritance. One of the most important concepts underlying Ricoeur's thought is the importance of achieving voluntary freedom over involuntary aspects of being. To what extent have our responses to life's externalities been properly considered as opposed to being conditioned reflexes?

But first, we must decide how to select past events for our review. Perhaps we could borrow Braudel's criterion of selecting 'headlines from the past'. Or we could look at turning points where our lives changed direction or 'axial events' after which nothing was the same. Historical events can either be in calendar or phenomenological time where the nature of the mental event, and its significance, is now seen as more important than when it took place. It is almost certainly the case that, when composing our historical self-narrative, we will have to reconstruct the events. From our perspective in the present we can try to empathise with our younger self and re-imagine what was in our mind at the time. But it will be difficult to have a re-performance of that original mental event without also including what is currently in our mind. We can no more become that younger self again than an historian can enter the minds of his historical characters to re-perform their thoughts.

The difficulties the historian faces in constructing a credible plot narrative are the same ones facing us in constructing a credible self-narrative. The full context of all the happenings around an event is almost never available. As Ricoeur says, the past conceived of as what *actually* happened is out of reach of the historian. When we consider what has happened to our past self we are limited by the 'horizon of unregarded stimuli' (all that

Ricoeur

data outside immediate attention). Plus, when we were acting in the past, we were surrounded by the confusion and opacity of the present. Historians do their best to put in place a full explanation of events and those with a scientific bent will try to find 'covering laws'. But when we look into this concept of 'covering laws' more deeply we see educated guesswork and speculation about what appear to be patterns within history. 'This is what tends to happen during revolutions'. This line of argument could be applied to our personal histories. 'This is what tended to happen in this community at that time'. It is even possible to construct our narratives on the basis of the effects particular institutions have had on our lives. Ricoeur described such reliance on the role of institutions as 'cement' used to fix stories in social history.

Neither historians nor we can track the complex chain of causes and effects leading up to any event. None of our reconstructions can come close to what Ricoeur calls 'the ontological independence' of the past event. This means we can only rely on facts to a limited extent. Most of what we reconstruct from the past is based on interpretation and imagination. What's more, we don't want to see ourselves as mere balls on the snooker table of life. We want to preserve the idea of freedom of action despite our socio-economic circumstances.

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St. Augustine

Hegel

So when it comes to constructing a self-narrative from an historical point of view we will want to put emphasis on the decisions we freely made without being able to enquire too closely into all the factors that went into making those decisions. It is arguable, therefore, that we end up creating imaginative reconstructions of our past founded on the desire to present ourselves as fully engaged agents creating our own destinies.

## Fiction and Figurative Language in Self-narrative

So we need to create plots for our self-narrative that contain explanations. Ricoeur says that if narrative is dismissed by philosophy as too elementary a discourse, opportunities are lost to put explanations together. It is possible to configure a plot in such a way that it includes a whole range of contributions to an event – circumstances, goals, interactions and prevailing ideologies amongst others. The aim is to pull them all together into an intelligible whole. Philosophy has shown us how wearisome the search for exact causes can become. The hunt for causes can become never-ending so we have to cut in with intuitive judgments and it is those judgments that help us tell our stories in a coherent way. Then, suddenly, we realise we are in the territory of fictional narrative. This is not a process of deliberate self-deception but the result of a realistic awareness that we will never be able
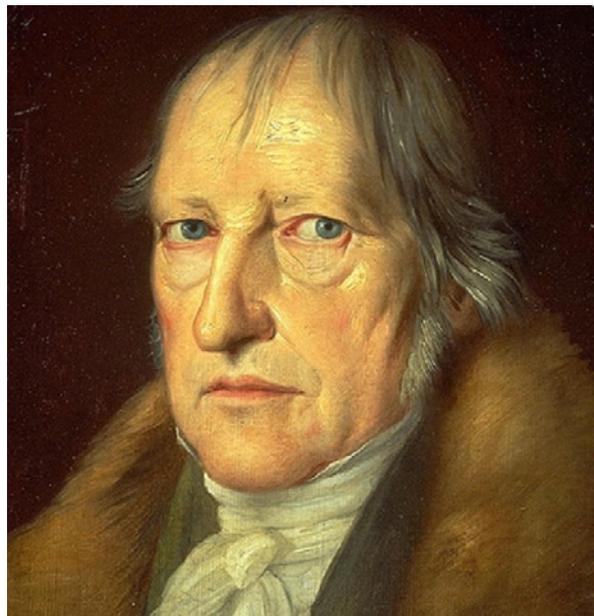
to sit like a judge weighing up all our decisions and the degree of our personal responsibility for them.

Ricoeur comes to our aid by reminding us that self-understanding is nourished by reading great literature (historical or fictional) and by using our imaginations. Since the self has to understand itself through language, we can rise to higher levels of thought by choosing symbolic, figurative language where metaphors extend thoughts and feelings. We must use philosophy, says Ricoeur, to help us grapple with a polysemic abundance, a 'surplus of meanings' that emerges from our use of figurative language. By its very nature poetic discourse is a product of pre-objective subjectivity that allows us to see further than what is obvious and open up new possibilities. Immersion in poetry and literary prose gives us a range of new experiences where our normal horizon of meanings can fuse with alien ones. The result is that the mind can grow, becoming richer in concepts. Ricoeur argues poetic discourse acts to destroy conventional language in order to reconstruct it at a higher level and create new information and feelings in readers. Metaphors build bridges between concepts opening up new meanings. Indeed, the metaphorical meaning creates its sense amongst the ruins of the literal sense, being less concerned with truth than with insight. It does not merely substitute for the old

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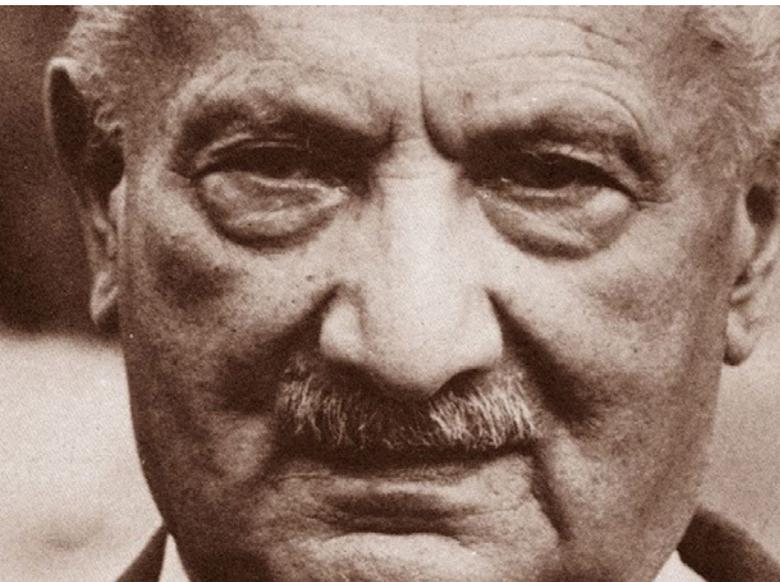
Heidegger

meaning, it completely transforms it and it is that transformation that leads to light-bulb moments – 'oh, I see!'

This ability to create new meanings is also a way of explaining, which is why metaphor has become such an important tool of literature and philosophy. Metaphors have a deeply strategic role in the creation of new understandable concepts. Hegel went so far as to say the concept comes alive in 'the death of the metaphor' as it receives its own significance. Heidegger seemed to go further saying: 'thinking is a hearing and seeing' and 'the metaphorical exists only within the metaphysical'.

The Blending of History and Fiction in Self-narrative

We can now see self-narrative as a historico-fictive production using figurative language to mix old and new realities. We have seen that the barriers between history and fiction are permeable. When history uses imagination, and when fiction harnesses realism, we end up with a unique amalgam of fact and fiction in stories whose aim is to get as close to the truth as possible. As Ricoeur says, a great work of history can be read like a novel, and a great novel can create the impression of real events. The distinction between real and unreal in terms of the phenomenological experience disappears. Ricoeur tells us that history as quasi-fiction and fiction as quasi-history lead

to narratives with the capacity to redescribe, resignify and remake events so we see them 'as if' they were happening right in front of our eyes. We can justify the claim that self-narrative is always going to be a mix of fact and fiction because of the inherent impossibility of producing a strictly verifiable record of our lives, and because of our need to create a credible and coherent story.

Marx said: people 'make their own history, but not as they please. They do not choose for themselves but have to work upon circumstances as they find them'. However, the very process of constructing a self-narrative means taking control of one's own history, part of which involves making an assessment of the extent to which free choices have been limited by necessity. Ricoeur sees this as working with the dialectics of sedimentation versus innovation and of continuity versus discontinuity. Our challenging of the past, our reinterpretations of events, are designed to create a 'living, continuous, open history' – a history open enough for us to be able to consider new possibilities for the future.

In assembling a credible plot we are forced to confront our essential historicity. We are the products of our place in space-time. But we are also the producers of our own experiences, at least in how we respond to them. Ricoeur writes about a 'space of experience' that grows in our minds. As our self-narrative develops, a series of interweaving perspectives emerges to which Ricoeur assigns another explanatory triad, that of our reception of the past, our experience in the present and our expectations for the future. As temporal beings, our understanding of the past can inform our future and break open new experiences. The constant intermingling of past, present and future within our self-narrative provides us with more opportunities for reflection. For example, we can review how, in our past, we saw the future. Such a review, as Ricoeur says, can lead us to examine 'forgotten possibilities, aborted potentialities and repressed endeavours'. In this context, the 'what-has-been' mingles with the 'what-might-have-been' to illuminate the 'what-is-now' and shed even more light on 'what-can-still-be'.

(This paper was presented at The Wednesday meeting 18th January 2023)

Inkling

David Fogg

Inkling.
A little think.
Thin ink and tracing paper. Word wraiths.
A cue for pinning half-thoughts, penning them in, letting them out.
A slip of a thing, an inkling, a tip for the tongue. Elusive, allusive, pray.
The dictionary says, 'Etymology uncertain', with a soupçon of 'suspicion', a risk of 'danger', a step in the 'groove', marked up to 'notch', a murmur it's 'whisper' ... Delicious indecision!
The Inklings: Oxford literati and little hints at their issues. A name settling on people, people settling on a name.
Follow inkling's sounds to King's Lynn, spin the links, sling its ilk in. A free ride, one to cleave thought and meaning, music its kin. Or make sense of it, sing an inkling's synonyms, intuit it, glance askance, catch its breath and foster its novelty. It's a Sinn!
A scent of correspondence awaiting assent, spirit's ascent to lofty expression or fall to down-trodden cliché-residue; clean-cut crop or stubbly aftermath.
An assignment yet to be undertaken. Letters still to arrive. Dotted lines, tinkling notes. Violin strings quavering. Homing in on a poem. Chit-chat on the way to a play. Novel ideas.
Inkling. Kindling for the imagination. A sign-like pointer, a trainee of thought, unqualified. A waiting waif, stray, hopeful. Secretive, released en parole.
Non-disclosure agreement between mind and medium. The wrinkling brow winkling out a clue: 'The foggiest?'.
Just a notion, half-heard. A vexed text, not quite there, hovering.
Twinkling originality.
An inkling…
No, it's gone.

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Descend

At first, I was only half, the other half

as in a mirror's reflection,

always remaining inside

groping, a secret,

Yes, once I was half broken, half glittering,

constantly emerging from the alcove of self,

burning in water, drowning in fire,

then I was half body, half breath

neither one nor the other,

a water flame, someone on the edge.

I carried the self-image, left with me,

before I slipped into the darkness,

in those years that splinter like sleep

entwined with the roots of nothingness.

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Logic

The Logic of Relativity

In this article I describe how relative expressions may be understood in terms of implicit parameters. Explicitly identifying such parameters helps avoid ambiguity and misunderstanding, and can also enhance our understanding. Examples include subjective, moral, scientific, and mathematical propositions which may be expressed using implicit parameters.

CHRIS **SEDDON**

Parameters

Language may be regarded as: vocabulary, by means of which language-users relate words to concepts; and grammar, by means of which language-users relate ways of combining words to ways of combining concepts. One fundamental grammatical form is the operation of a concept as an operator, on any number of concepts as operands, to form another concept as a result. One fundamental concept is that of logical negation, which operates on any number of operands to form as a result the proposition that none of those operands is true. A proposition is anything that is the result of such a negation.

Our beliefs and desires are propositions in this sense, even if the relevant concepts and their operations are only evident in our behaviour, and not actually expressed in our vocabulary or grammar.

If an operator operating on a set of operands forms a proposition, then that set of operands is a first parameter of the operator. If instead it forms another operator with a set of operands as an nth parameter, then that set of operands is a next (n+1th) parameter of the original operator.

For example, in the expression "Chris loves Dolly", "loves" expresses an operator, "Dolly" expresses a parameter, and "Chris" expresses another parameter. Which parameter is first and which is second depends on how the expression is parsed, however any normal concept of love require two parameters: a lover, and a beloved. Similarly the concept of giving requires three parameters: a giver, a receiver, and a gift. The concept of happiness requires one parameter: a subject.

Most importantly, concepts are defined in terms of their parameters. For example, the definitions of a "lover" as "one who loves", and of a "beloved" as "one who is loved" depend on the definition of "love". Any normal definition of "love" is generalised with respect to those two parameters, for example: "That a *lover* **loves** a *beloved* means that the *lover* will adopt the *beloved*'s desires as their own" - or whatever definition is considered appropriate. Because they are merely variables of the definition, the names of the parameters are only relevant when talking about the definition, not when using the defined concept.

Thus, to identify the parameters of a concept is to identify the generalised variables in the definition that must be instantiated before the concept can be used to express a belief or a desire.

Parameters are sometimes known in natural grammar as the subject and object of a verb, and in mathematical grammar as the arguments of a function or operands of an operator, however those familiar with computer or mathematical language should note that this concept of a parameter is not exactly the same as the concept of a function variable or argument, since it includes all operand sets required to form a proposition, not merely those required to form a specified grammatical type. For example, in "a+b=c" the parameters of the operator expressed by "=" are expressed by "a+b" and "c", but the parameters of the numeric operator expressed by "+", whilst they include the concepts expressed by "a" and "b", will also include any parameters that such numbers themselves require to form a proposition.

Subjectivity

In this article I am focusing on implicit parameters - that is, those parameters which, whilst required by the definition of a concept, are not always explicitly

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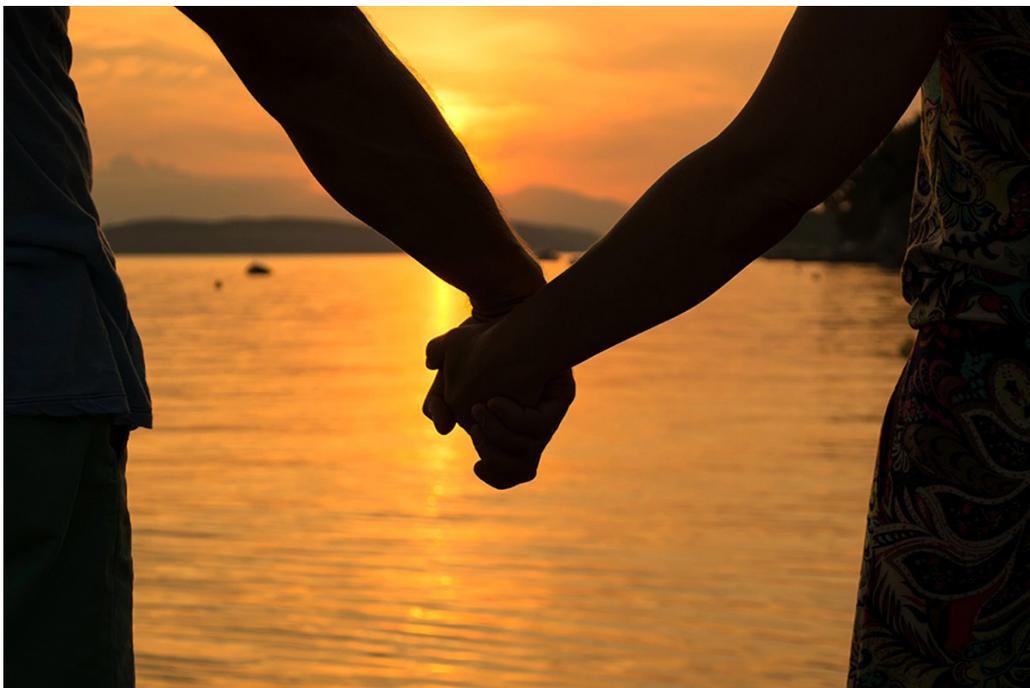
When in love

put into words, but are instead implied by and inferred from the context.

Subjective statements, for example, are often expressed using implicit parameters. Saying that something is disgusting usually just means that *I* find it disgusting. In certain contexts it might mean that I think *you* will find it disgusting too. I don't really mean that the thing is objectively disgusting in itself - at the most I might mean that everyone does or should find it disgusting. The implicit parameter is the *subject*, which might be something like *I*, or *we*, or *all right-minded people*.

Of course, the use of the words "should" or "right-minded" would indicate that something more than mere subjectivity is being implied in that instance - a moral stance is being adopted. I merely intend to cite statements of disgust as a relatively uncontentious example of relative statements. Not all relative statements are equivalent, and in particular, a statement of disgust is not always a moral statement.

Moral Relativity
However, I will argue that moral statements are also often expressed using implicit parameters.

Saying that something is good may mean that it is good for some *purpose*. Alternatively, it might mean that it is good for *our* purpose. In the former case the implicit parameter might be the *purpose*, for which it is good. In the latter case the implicit parameter might be the *people*, for whom it serves some purpose. The context might even imply both parameters: both for what *purpose* and for *whom*.

In other contexts, it might mean that it is good, not just for some purpose, but in itself. Indeed, if we justify something because it is good for some purpose, we beg the question why we have that purpose. Ultimately there must be some things we just instinctively want, as the result of our evolutionary and cultural history. But not every person and certainly not every creature has the same such unconditional desires, so statements about absolute morals are still relative. Either such an unconditional desire is a *purpose* which justifies other actions, which makes the justification relevant to others who share that desire, or those *others* are the people who share that unconditional desire. For example, although saying that unnecessary killing is wrong sounds absolute, its only real use is in the sense that *we* really do not want unnecessary killing. The purpose of moral debate is to establish common aims and how to achieve them.

It is tempting to think that an absolute moral statement is somehow stronger than a relative one, but the reverse is the case. If no purpose or people were identified then something would be good or bad merely by definition, which would beg the question of what it would mean for anyone to choose to adopt that definition, rather than any other.

Identifying the people or the purpose for a moral statement actually helps to avoid an individualistic or coercive approach, by enabling all those involved to seek together to understand what they want to achieve and how.

Scientific Relativity
Whether or not my analysis of moral statements as relative to people or purposes does accurately

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Even logical positivists are capable of love.

— A.J. Ayer —

describe how we use such statements, science provides many examples of terms the definitions of which have been refined to describe more phenomena more accurately than previous definitions, which we now understand to rely on hitherto unsuspected parameters.

For example, although we usually think of the weight of an object as being absolute, Newton realised that it was in fact relative to the Earth's gravitational field. His equations suggested that the force which causes the orbits of the different planets round the sun was the same force which causes objects to fall to Earth. The *effective gravitational field* - a function of the distance and mass of nearby massive objects - is an additional parameter. An object has one weight on Earth, and a different weight on Mars.

Similarly, Einstein's calculations suggested that simultaneity is relative to an *inertial frame of reference*. Just as we are used to weighing things only on Earth and therefore understandably ignore the fact that weight is really relative to the effective gravitational field - or to put it more accurately, the most useful concept of weight is really relative to the effective gravitational field - so too, we are used to judging whether events occur at the same time only on Earth and therefore understandably ignore the fact that simultaneity is really relative to an inertial frame of reference - or to put it more accurately, the most useful concept of simultaneity is really relative to an inertial frame of reference.

It is worth noting the relationship between scientific facts and conceptual utility. The fact is that weight varies in different gravitational fields. So a more useful concept of weight is one in which the effective gravitational field is a parameter - and indeed I could not even state the fact that weight varies without using such a concept.

Our pre-Newtonian concept of weight permits approximate descriptions that are sufficiently accurate for most daily purposes. In a practical sense, we can be "certain" that in the absence of any change to an apple's composition, it will weigh the same in our penthouse as it did in the shop, but Newton's concepts of mass and gravity permit us to describe more accurately how much less such an apple will weigh in our penthouse.

Our pre-Einsteinian concept of simultaneity also permits approximate descriptions that are sufficiently accurate for most daily purposes. In a practical sense, we can be "certain" that a satellite sent a signal just those few tiny fractions of a second before we received it that radio signals require to travel that distance, but Einstein's concepts of space-time and inertial frames of reference permit our car navigation systems to calculate more accurately our position on the road relative to the Global Positioning System satellites, taking into account more accurately how much slower the clocks on the satellites run than the clocks in our cars.

Mathematical Relativity
Mathematicians are so used to dealing in very general terms that they might forget or never even think about implied parameters.
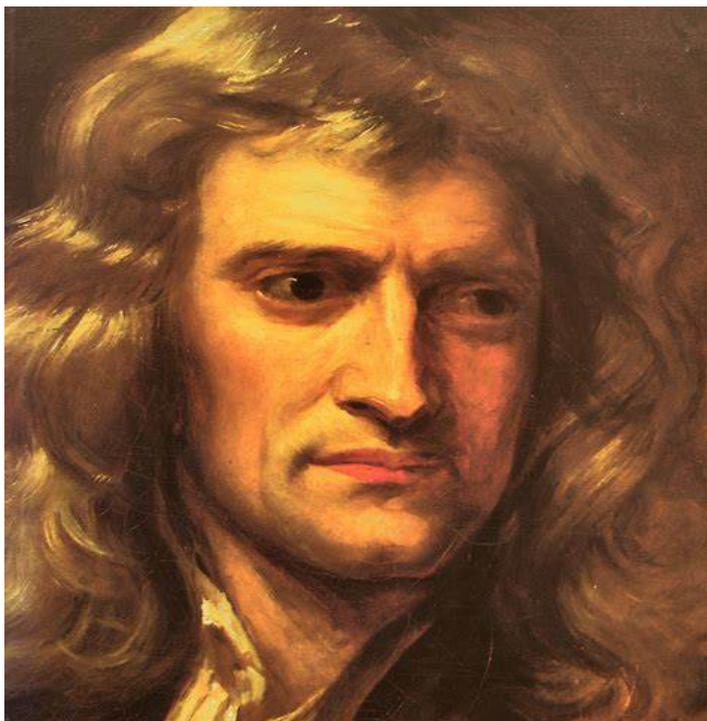
Newton

Einstein

Take the Cardinal numbers, for example. A simple equation such as "2+3=5" could only be true if "2+3" and "5" had the same parameters. The parameters of a Cardinal number include the *class of objects* to be counted - for example, the cutlery on a table. But what counts as the same item of cutlery? Are there: three items - knives, forks, and spoons; or seven - fish knives and forks, and steak knives and forks, soup and dessert spoons and dessert forks; or forty-two - all that lot for each of six diners? The possibility of different counts in this example demonstrates that differentiating items is not a matter of absolute identity - either we need an additional *equivalence* parameter indicating what is to count as the same object, or the *class of objects* parameter needs to include additional grammar enabling some comparisons to be made.

The so-called Real numbers have a different implied parameter - a *convergent series* of other numbers, which series will have its own implied parameters.

Analytical mathematical theorems typically generalise such parameters. A statement such as "2 + 3 = 5" is true for many types of number, for example, and a statement such as "Cardinal numbers form a group under addition" relies on a higher order of generalisation. Mathematical concepts only express contingent propositions when non-mathematical parameters are instantiated. For example, that there are 2 of my cats in my garden and 3 of someone
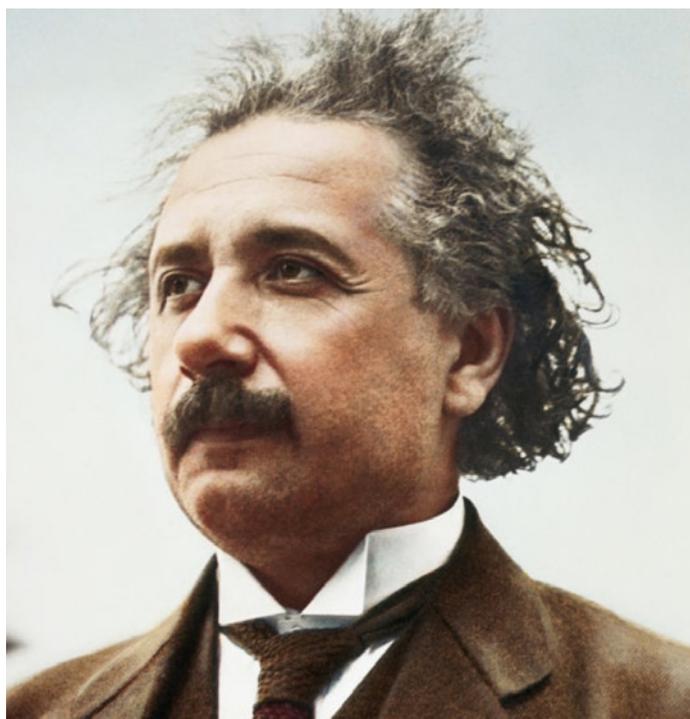
else's cats in my garden is a contingent proposition expressed using the two mathematical concepts expressed by the numerals. The application of a mathematic truth might lie in inferring analytically that there are therefore 5 cats in my garden, another less specific contingent proposition.

Conclusions

Naive relativism tends to regard implicit parameters as if they were applied generally to the predicate of **truth**, for example "It may not be true for you but it is true for me". This overly general account of relativity is notoriously self-defeating in the infinite regress it implies - if it's only true for you, is it only true for you for you, or is it only true for you for me too? and so on.

Identifying parameters that may sometimes or always be implied in natural language helps provide a cogent definition of terms which are otherwise hard to define. As the scientific examples in particular demonstrated, the technique can help us discover or invent new terms that enable us to express newly discovered or imagined situations.

Implicit parameters are just one example of the fact that the underlying grammar of our language is not always reflected in the superficial grammatical form.

This paper was presented at The Wednesday meeting 11th January 2023.

'Know Thyself': a Caution

CHRIS **NORRIS**

When I left him, I reasoned thus with myself: I am wiser than this man, for neither of us appears to know anything great and good; but he fancies he knows something, although he knows nothing; whereas I, as I do not know anything, so I do not fancy I do. In this trifling particular, then, I appear to be wiser than he, because I do not fancy I know what I do not know.

Socrates, in Plato, *The Apology of Socrates*, trans. Jowett

Dubious at best, that thought of Socrates.
Wise counsel, kind of thing they have to say,
Those Socrates-type thinkers who'd refuse
The rest their just entitlement to shy
From regions flagged 'think Oedipus: beware!'.

Dubious because, of all such thinkers, he's
The one who opted always to portray
Himself as knowing nothing, or accuse
His followers of choosing to deny
What he'd so often said: that it was their

Naivete that gifted him the keys
To wisdom and endowed a popinjay
With piercing intellect – no doubt a ruse
To get their sympathy and, on the sly,
Suggest he'd thoughts too precious to declare.

Rehearse instead the truths of Sophocles:
That knowledge blinds, that understanding may
Bring untold horrors, that enquiring whose
The guilt or error wrecks your alibi
And leaves you bearing the accurséd share.

The error starts by thinking to appease
The gods, or keep the Erinyes at bay,
Just by unravelling the trail of clues
They laid to have you, all-unknowing, ply
The knower's path to wisdom and despair.

Trust Socrates, we say: it's knowledge frees
The mind from ignorance, ensures we pray
To no false gods or idols, bids us choose
The way of reason, and has us apply
Its precepts sedulously lest we err.

Socrates in his last hour

Yet see how those sharp-clawed elenchi squeeze
Poor lives as well as arguments; how they,
The heroes like the muddle-heads, all lose
Their stake, submit, plead ignorance, or die
As dialectic springs its knowledge-snare.

Wracked sons of Oedipus, Antigones
Walled up when civic reason has its way –
No destiny but puts the tragic screws
On all who'd tempt their nemesis and try
Whatever counter-reasonings they dare.

Centuries on, it brought them to their knees,
That new Socratic bag of tricks to lay
On their thick skulls and have them pay their dues
To a sharp logothete with beady eye
Peeled ready to pre-empt them everywhere.

Said Nietzsche: split it with Euripides,
The blame for all that must in time betray
Aeschylus' tragic spirit that could fuse
The chorus with its Dionysian cry
Of wild ecstatic grief and, past compare,

The Apollonian formal drive to seize
Control and bring it, through the interplay
Of two such mighty forces, to enthuse
Spectators who'd then exit on a high
And vent their passions on the Athenian air.

Too rational, too plainly out to please
A well-adjusted audience and stay
In the good graces of a civil muse –
That's Nietzsche's take on it when he lets fly
At the Euripedean will to square

The tragic storm with the emollient breeze
Of a Socratic dawn where light of day
Breaks on those scenes of horror with the news
Of reason's nascent drive to clarify
What primal appetites were striving there.

Adjust for taste and everyone agrees:
It's 'know thyself', the gist they'd all convey,
Though much depends on their respective views
Of what they mean, those rival parties, by
Such words as 'know' and 'self', the sort that bear,

At times, the weight and moment of all these
Unknown and self-tormenting quests to slay
The monsters bred of reason's fitful snooze
When love, fate, justice, fear, and hatred vie
For what small recompense the Sphynx might spare.

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'**Cloudman**'
Polyurethane sculpture
(height: 10 cm) (2023)
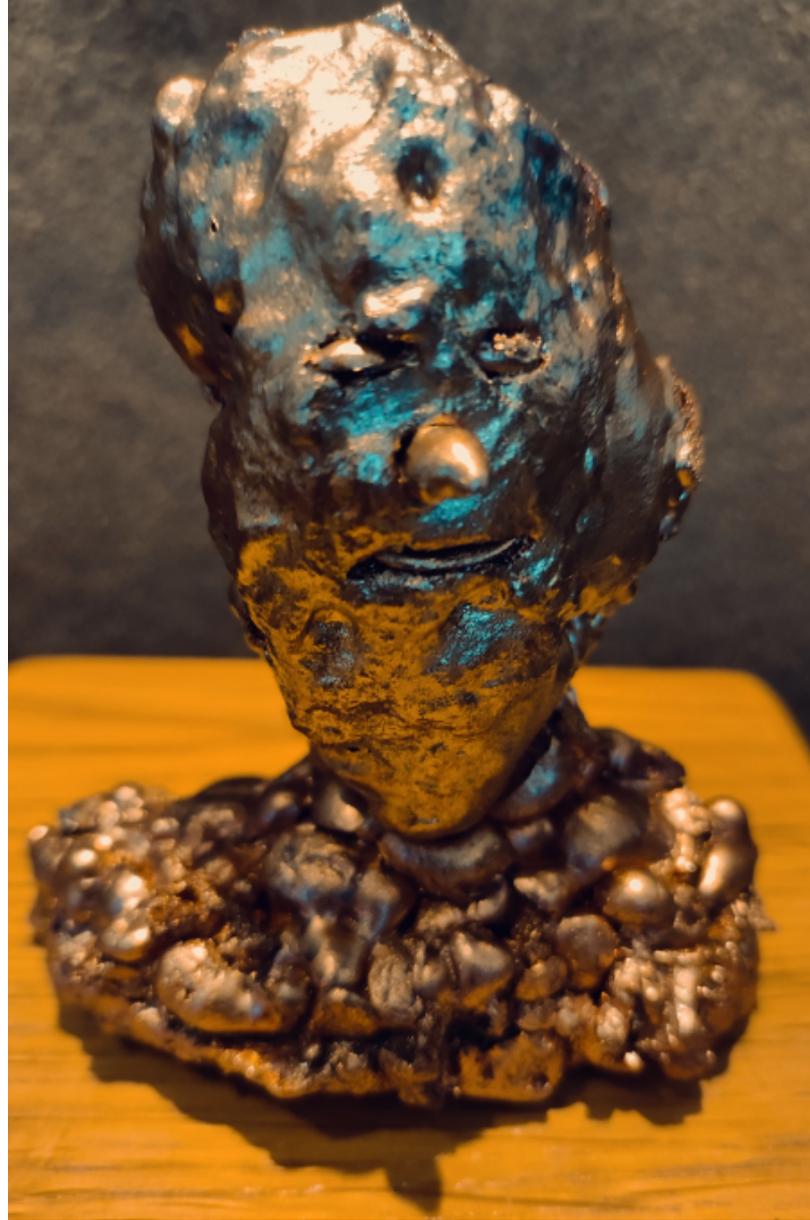
In the Cloud

Dr. ALAN XUEREB

In my personal quest to understand what 'art' is, I found a methodology which helps me to feel inspired and at the same time analyse what is going on at a deeper level. This is similar but not identical to Heidegger's method of *dissecting* an everyday object in order to find its essence, its *ousia*.

I have to admit I had already decided not to use polyurethane again for my little works of art. Polyurethane is somehow uncontrollable and slightly hazardous, especially if you have never used it before. However, I had some solidified pieces of this foam and I did not want to throw them away. Their contours were too interesting. The largest part of these leftovers looked to me a bit like a snowman with an atypical disproportionate elongated head. After I had carved it and meticulously added some other smaller components left over from my previous usage of this foam, I decided, as I often do, to ask my children what should I call this little sculpture? They both saw clouds not snow in it. Hence the name 'Cloudman'.

Needless to say, that my mind ran wild. Clouds, the real ones, create unrepeatable patterns in the sky, open to interpretation by the onlooker. Nonetheless, my thought process took a drastic different turn.

I thought about the internet cloud. I thought about the universe as a brain. After all, some believe that there is a divine message hidden in our physical universe and work every day to discover the content of that message, with the hope of catching a glimpse of the mind of God - as Michio Kaku puts it. So much so, that some philosophers and scientists have conjectured the universe to be some kind of information processor. However, it is only a conjecture, without much scientific support.

Even though one must say, visually, from what we know. the dark matter filaments look a lot like the neurones in our own brains. 'What if', I asked myself, 'we are part of God's mind?' Imagine if we were actually His elaborate thoughts, fantasies or dreams? A little quick research made me aware that

this philosophy was called Pandeism and it has been around for a while. But there is more to it. We humans, are biblically speaking, created in God's own image. What if the last step of transhumanism becomes the integration of one's own consciousness with one's own surroundings, as Ray Kurzweil would surmise. In doing so, emulating our creator and becoming one with the universe; and according to this pandeistic idea one with God? What if we are going already in that direction by having invented the internet? More specifically, by having invented the 'cloud'. You may have heard people using terms like cloud computing, or cloud storage. However, what exactly is the cloud?

Unpretentiously put, the cloud is the Internet—more specifically, it is all of the things you can access remotely over the Internet. When something is in the cloud, it means it is stored on Internet servers instead of your computer's hard drive.

'The cloud' consequently refers to servers that are accessed over the Internet, and the software and databases that run on those servers. At this point, I could not contain my imagination. I kept harping back to a philosophy lecture I attended back in 1988 about this concept of 'noossphere'.

The noosphere is a philosophical concept developed and promoted by the Russian-Ukrainian Soviet biogeochemist Vladimir Vernadsky, and the French philosopher and Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Vernadsky defined the noosphere as the new state of the biosphere and described it as the planetary 'sphere of reason'. The noosphere, according to de Chardin, represents the highest stage of biospheric development, its defining factor being the development of humankind's rational activities.

The leap from the concept of noosphere to Sanskrit was shorter than one could imagine. The Akashic field (or cloud) is a very old concept. Akasha or Akash means space or sky or æther in traditional Indian cosmology, depending on the religion.

Of course, Western Occultism developed this old concept into something different: the Akashic Records. As Alex Nash explains, the Akashic Records is a concept describing a space that contains information about everything in existence since the dawn of time. If one were able to peer through the layer of reality separating us from it and access this infinite database, they would essentially be able to attain absolute knowledge on a scale that surpasses anything a normal human mind can comprehend by far. Is this pseudoscience, science fiction religion or philosophy one may ask? In his book, *Our Mathematical Universe*, M.I.T. professor Max Tegmark explores the possibility that math does not just describe the universe, but makes the universe.

Well, whatever your perception about this subject is, one has to admit that my little spooky 10 cm sculpture has a lot more to say than what meets the eye.

Daylight Comes Round

Daylight comes round, just like a faithful friend
And so much that is precious meets my sight,
The grey cathedral towers that delight
With the mysterious message which they send.

The times when they were built are at an end,
That message then no longer has the might
To undo the troubles of our human plight
And show our destiny its heavenly end.

But still to see them makes me meditate
On much that was and is and soon will be,
The eternal riddle of our human state.

How wisdom somehow always comes too late,
And history no longer has a key
Since Providence has been replaced by Fate.

Edward Greenwood