The Wednesday



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group at Albion Beatnik - Oxford

Editorial

Descartes' Demon

This week, thousands of philosophy students in this country will start their philosophical journey with the problems which were raised by Descartes.

Descartes has lots of achievements to his name - mathematics, science and philosophy. But he is studied and remembered mainly for his *Meditations*, particularly his obsession with the possibility that we are misled about our knowledge of the world by a malicious demon. This demon is so powerful that every philosophy student in the English-speaking world has to know and be ready for a decisive confrontation with him. However, the irony of the matter is that even when victory is guaranteed to the student the demon still has the last laugh. It is not the fault of the student, but possibly that of his teachers and generations of philosophers since Descartes. They all lost their freedom to this demon who kept them on their guard. This is a different point from scepticism. It is not that the demon is raising doubts about knowledge and you have to assure yourself that the demon is wrong; we do have arguments to show knowledge is possible and certain. But still the demon is the winner after you have stated all your proofs. How could that be?

Descartes' demon has defined the starting point of all philosophy that labours under his threat. Epistemology moved central stage, not only for beginners but also for well known philosophers, such as Kant and his worry about scepticism and the modern philosophers, or Putnam and his version of the demon in the form of the mad scientist who is manipulating us as if we are, for his experiments, brains in the vats. Both old and new demons take away our freedom by controlling what we know, one by supernatural

power and the other by virtual reality. We are free in our attempt to know, but are controlled by these demons. We enter into combat with them but what is the end of this combat? The end is to show that we really have knowledge of the world, that our thoughts are dictated by the world, as in the correspondence theory for example.

Kant of course realised that this is a mistake. We know the world not because our thought corresponds to a world independent of us but because we posit such a world (to us a Fichtean term). But Kant was worried about the demon and the old brain in the vat (Idealism) so he lost whatever freedom he gained in his Copernican Revolution by surrendering to a point where freedom is not free floating but anchored into *The* Thing in Itself! All this is to safeguard against the demon of Idealism. However, he was not unaware of the loss of freedom and he saw true freedom in the Practical and not the Pure Reason. It seems we are free in the first where we are not worried by the demons but not free in the second where we exchange the external control by demon to a limitation imposed by the thing-in-itself. That is why Fichte, and early Schelling, considered him dogmatic and not critical enough.

The arguments of Kant have to be pushed to their logical conclusion to see that the obsession with epistemology (*What could I know?*) will not give us our *freedom*. For that we need the (*What can I do?*). It is in going beyond the world of demons to the world of action that *freedom* comes to the fore and philosophy gains relevance to life, art, poetry and the creation of a better world.

The Editor



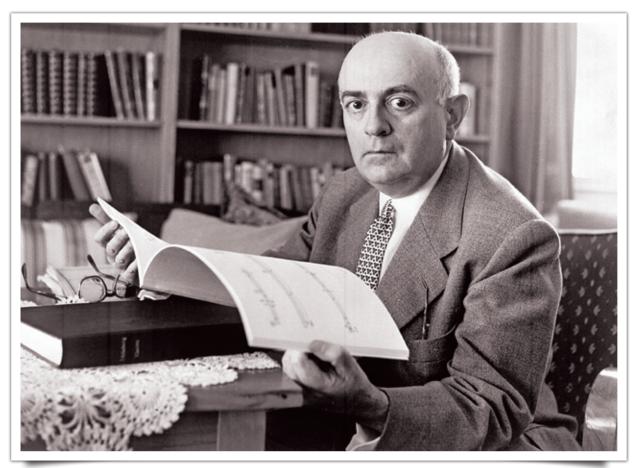
Adorno The Tragic End

Adorno was a critical philosopher but after returning from years in Exile in the United State he was then considered part of the establishment and was condemned by the student movement of 1969. The Iraqi sociologist, Dr. I. al-Haidari was studying sociology in Germany during the 60s and early 70s when he wrote his Ph.D. thesis. He attended the lecture by Adorno when a group of protestors invaded the lecture Hall. Three females went to the stage where Adorno stood, they took off their jackets and bared their chests. Al-Haidari witnessed this incident and wrote this article on the thought of Adorno and his tragic end with the Student Revolution of the late 60:

Dr. IBRAHIM AL-HAIDARI

Adorno's name has been connected, together with the name of Mx Horkheimer, with the founding of the "Institute of Social research" at Frankfurt University. It became known afterward as the "Frankfurt School" in Critical Sociology. He became a professor of philosophy and aesthetics and later on assisted Horkheimer in the administration of the Institute. They both cooperated in developing and enriching the Critical Theory. Adorno, together with Ernest Bloch and Horkheimer, are considered the leading German philosophers after the Second World War.

Adorno worked towards establishing the foundations and



Adorno

principles of the Critical Theory of **Frankfurt School** and he worked towards presenting a social critical theory that is not an empirical science only, but a critical social science that realises the dreams of the middle class in Europe in its struggle for freedom, social struggle and the end of injustice. Also called for these values and principles not to be kept at the theoretical level, but they must be brought to the level of practice. These values shouldn't be compromised by any authority, since its aim is the self-mastery of the human being in its pure essence, in order to raise a universal social consciousness that will carry on the responsibility of social change.

Adorno was born in Frankfurt (1903-1969). He studies philosophy, music and sociology in his hometown. Due to his frequenting music and artistic circles in Venna at an early age and his special interest in the techniques of the Twelve-Tone which was developed by Schoenberg since 1922, Adorno came to be known as a critic and a theoretician of modern music. He was also a philosopher, a social scientist and social critic who had left his marks on the history of philosophy and

social criticism in Germany and beyond; to Europe and America.

The thoughts of Adorno can be understood in view of the Frankfurt School in philosophy and sociology on one hand and to his artic sensitivity and his aesthetic outlook on the other hand. All this made him the philosopher he is, with universal relevance to Aesthetic critique of modernity, Negative Dialectic, Mass Culture and beyond to his critical questions about Reason, Rationality, Totalitarian Politics and the social and cultural conflicts that came out of Modernity.

Adorno was hugely influenced by the Hegelian dialectic. Despite being considered a leftist philosopher, he didn't believe in the possibility of realising socialism in reality. The task of the philosopher, as practiced by him, is concentrated around criticism, not only social criticism, but the different schools and trends in philosophy, literature, modern art and music, as well as the main traditional crafts.

Adorno started his philosophical project by



Horkheimer and Adorno

cooperating with Horkheimer. He started from a critical stand and started to analyse the reasons for the failure of the bourgeoise revolutions in Europe. But he changed after that to the study of the theory of knowledge and aesthetics to combat the Nazi ideology and its applied forms which it has nurtured and developed to extend its totalitarian hegemony over society. He directed his attack against the traditional philosophy which has been emptied of its revolutionary function and role. Philosophy, as Adorno sees it, has become a superstructure for Idealist systems as it has been represented in the ideas of the Marburg school of philosophy, Existentialism and Positivism. These trends which came under attack by Adorno, made human beings sieged by the contradictions of Subjectivity and Identity, and pushed Adorno to the study of condition of the oppressed and alienated individual and the problematic of his consciousness, in an attempt to get philosophy out of its irrelevant formal situation and to present an example of material analysis, which was a negative stand to the methodical German Existential philosophy as represented by the Ontological Existentialism of Heidegger, as well as, Karl Jaspers.

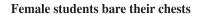
Adorno immigrated after the rise of Hitler to power. He studied philosophy at Merton College, Oxford University. He planned to write a Ph. D. thesis on the philosopher Edmund Husserl. But during this period, he wrote a paper on Karl

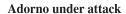
Manheim's Sociology of Knowledge and another on Avant guard Music for Vienna Music magazine and one on Jazz for the Frankfurt Zeitschrift fur **Sozialforschung**. He then immigrated to America in 1938 to work with Horkheimer in the branch of the Institute of Social Research in Columbia University. When the Second World War ended, he returned to Frankfurt in 1949. He became the director of the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt until his death on the 6th of August 1969. Adorno took up his academic responsibilities after his return to Germany, and started to rebuild the intellectual structure of the Federal Germany. He started writing on different issues related to the critical theory and reflect a certain distinguish take on the philosophy of art. He understood aesthetic to be more than a theory of art, and took it to be, much like Hegel, a special kind of relationship between Subject and Object. He became the thinking conscience of Germany during the fifties and sixties, side by side with Horkheimer and Marcuse. He symbolised in his character the Committed Intellectual who destroys the given and problems of his age and to aspires to building instead new place and new problematics.

Exile was for him a catalyst for his thought and an enrichment of his theoretical works, especially when he lived in America and so at first hand the problems of the Capitalist system in one of its highest applications. This has created a reaction within him that <u>led</u> him to a critical analysis of the nature of the capitalist society, as well as the nature of art and its place in a society that has reached to a very advanced consumer phase. He also made a connection between artistic production in all its forms, contents and appearances and the means of media, propaganda and advertising, all in its relation to the economic role played in society by all this.

We can summarise his critical theses in three complex and inter-related dialectics: the dialectic of reason, negative dialectic and aesthetic theory. They form a complex conceptual dialectic for the critique of Modernism and Post-Modernism.







Adorno follows in all this his **immanent critique**, in the sense of a critique of traditional philosophy and a critique of the human being who is cornered by the contradictions of subjectivity and identity.

Adorno started with a critique of traditional philosophy and then moved to the critique of the social situation of the alienated and oppressed individual which goes beyond the limits of the problematics of consciousness that governs him and society. And so, Adorno brings down philosophy from its high abstraction to make deal with the social situation, in an attempt to make a dialectic connection of theory and praxis.

Adorno spent most of the last twenty years of his life in western Germany after the division of Germany. He used to give advises to the new generation so that Germany does not fall again in the hands of Nazism or Fascism or the totalitarian ideology, after he became, together with Herbert Marcuse and Jurgen Habermas and others, the intellectual conscience of Germany". They took it on themselves to analyse the ideology of Capitalist Modernity that led to destruction and disaster. Their revolutionary views which was Marxist in its outlook became the ideological base of the protest movements, by students, workers

and far left and were used as constant slogans for combating Capitalism in advance industrial countries.

Writing on the protests of the student movements in the late sixties when I was a sociology student at Frankfurt University in Western Germany (then), reminded me of one important incident that I witnessed closely. Adorno started giving his talk on aesthetic when three girls wearing leather jackets approached the stage with red flowers in the hand of each and started to take off their jackets and stood naked and then each one presented her red flower to Adorno in a sarcastic theatrical manner. They were protesting against his views which were purely theoretical and did not touch the praxis in the social reality. He wasn't, for them, a radical intellectual who would get involved with the students in their marches in Frankfurt streets. Instead, he was trying to calm them down with his "revolutionary" views. They accused him of being conservative thinker who made a compromise with the bourgeoises. There was no option left to Adorno but to step down from the stage and leave the lecture theatre in a shock. A symbolic tragic end to his philosophical project. He became despondent died few months later after a heart attack. He was in his sixty fifth year.

Poetry



DAVID BURRIDGE

Delving For Truth

On the one hand.....

crumpled ideas are piled in my head,
bits of memory waiting to be fitted.
An object is beamed in, I must shape it and sense it
Somewhere in the heap is a full understanding
A quick flick through, it's found and fixed - for the time being.

On the other.....

Ideas are balloons that float in my ether.

Let them rise to a burst and spill realisation —

A drench of pure reason. Or a misunderstanding.

In the alternative.....

What's to be found or brought back, needs to be laid out, as on a carpenter's bench, measured and matched: generalised, analysed or synthesized Giving a construction to be used or discarded.

/

Pure-ly Reason-able

Tribute to Immanuel Kant

Table-top toiling, threading sense word by word. From the mire, I grab a slipped-out meaning to steady myself. Of course, there are terms lying here like forested trunks still to be labelled and moved, but nobody yet knows where to.

I am told to strip a body of all its description, until it is a shape on the ground - a thing in itself. Somewhere deep there are ideas, a-priori thin. Unseen foundation for building truth in a sensory world.

Am I bristling with categories to configure meaning or do Judgements occur only through stumble and bump? Perhaps I am like a bee poking into blooms, spreading pollen as an aside - and who decided that should bear fruit?

He gave us railing to grasp as we climb up his crafted steps.

I see him sitting there between the clock ticks he revered.

Piecing together all those surfaces and joints.

He furnishes the house for all to inhabit;

tenants from attic to cellar: those who stare out the window - those who wish to descend.

His work is more than just a heavy chew. It is a steady diet nourishing those who reject fast-food skims.

How I yearn to sip the litre and wrangle with analytic or synthetic.

When all said and done he wanted us to take a reasonable stand.

Poetry

A Delicacy Of Taste

(An expression used by Hume in his theory of imaginative association. He claimed verdicts of taste are individual and judgements are devoid of truth other than for the individual)

Perched in my head a thin piece of certainty that wobbles when they poke it. But I keep it pumped with truth value, whenever I can find some. Sneers always tweet of course:

Think you are so refined sorting out what seems valid.

Well here is the news, truth is dead and taste is what we tell you!

I still struggle to piece together facts into feasible shape, knowing it's not digitally cool. Now vicious light is doled out to slob our minds and prepare us for obedience.

Just like in years before, but this time our brains are stewed.

The barbarians are screening towards us.

David Burridge



Creative Art

'The Article of Faith'

by The Iraqi Artist *Mohamed Mustafa Kamal*



Book Review

The Winnowing Fan by Chris Norris

A Poetic Tour of Philosophy and Literary Theory

he talk in philosophical and poetic circles now is the new poetry collection by **Professor Chris Norris.** It is called "**The Winnowing Fan**", and will be published tomorrow Thursday the fifth of October by Bloomsbury Press, London. Terry Eagleton said of the collection:

"The appearance of *The Winnowing Fan* represents a major literary event. With extraordinary skill, insight and intellectual dexterity, Christopher Norris has reinvented the poetry of ideas for our time in this enthralling collection of unique, elegant, hugely ambitious works. It's certainly the most fascinating collection of poems I've read for many a year."

He is right in this judgment. Not only because of the novelty of the essay-verse form but also the content. Readers of **The** *Wednesday* already know Chris Norris from the extended coverage of his poetry reading event in issue 9 of this magazine and also from his poem which was published in issue 6. He is Distinguished Research Professor in Philosophy at Cardiff University and one of the world's leading



The Winnowing Fan

scholars on *Deconstruction*, and the work of Derrida. He has written around 40 books on various aspects of philosophy, literary theory, and music.

The new collection, which is about three hundred pages long, comes with an Foreword and an Afterward, both dealing with Mallarmé's symbolist poetics. These two pieces represent a manifesto of his verse-essay project. In the Foreword, Norris writes:

"... these pieces are mainly intended to launch a revival of that nowadays neglected literary form, the philosophical verse-essay. [...] This is why I conceived the project as seeking not so much to annul or dissolve the boundary between poetry and prose — an aim that my chosen verse forms very plainly disavow — as to raise various questions concerning the relationship between poetry, criticism, literary theory and philosophy of literature. Hence this extended introductory essay, which might otherwise seem out of place or suspiciously like special pleading."

The poems tend to be long and their themes are very subtle in their arguments. They take issue with philosophy, poetry and literary theory over the last three centuries both in the continental setting and the English-speaking world, as they are represented by major figures. Each poem comes with an introductory essay and end notes. The notes complement the introduction and both are vital to an understanding of what the poem is about and the poet's point of view.

Here is a taste of his poetry from his poem "A PLAIN MAN LOOKS AT THE ANGEL OF HISTORY". The reference is to Paul Klee's painting "The Angel of History" that Walter Benjamin owned and wrote about in one of his most talked about essay: "Theses on the Philosophy of History":

'Creative licence' and all that, but still It's clear enough, at any rate to my Sub-Benjaminian subtlety of eye And intellect, that no degree of skill In eking out a limited supply Of visual cues could possibly distil, From the Klee drawing, everything that will, In his last text, elude all those who try To grasp it or communicate its gist In terms that go along with this or that Choice hermeneutic slant. I'd say it's flat Impossible, but then perhaps I've missed The picture's point just as the arcane chat Of commentators manages to twist His words into some view of things that's grist To any meaning-mill they're grinding at,..."

The book ends with further reflections on Mallarme and closing remarks on Morris's project in this book. Commenting on his last poem, he says in the afterword, that it:

"can therefore be seen as a compendium of topics that have run through this whole sequence of poems and which, I now recognize, have much to do with my own (not merely) academic life history as a constant hopper across the disciplines of philosophy and literature. That I should eventually have turned to philosophizing or theorizing in verse as a way to reconcile that dualism, or at least achieve a workable modus vivendi, was always to this extent on the cards..."

The reader will find more reflections and a closer reading in the following article by David Clough.

The Wednesday

The Winnowing Fan:

A poetry book not for the faint hearted

ORRIS'S WINNOWING FAN proves to be quite high level with its heaviest guns at the start. The last poems are more like what we heard when he read his poems for **The** Wednesday event at the Albion Beatnik last time. But the book moves from fairly abstract pieces to some where either story or personality start to matter more. I found those easier, but the philosophy behind these pieces are always interesting.

Norris's own Forward/Preface is quite extended. It's an essay really on the history of recent Literary Criticism and how it uses philosophy sometimes to undermine its own

orthodoxies. At least he thinks Geoffrey Hartman reveals this quite explicitly. Yes, the Yale school was a view of romanticism that follows on from other recent US critics like Cleanth Brookes and MH Abrams but maybe it could absorb more French critique because it already recognized better its links with Jena romanticism. Then again French poets like Baudelaire, Mallarme and Valery had already influenced US poetry. But like some of our own critics when Derrida died, Norris clearly embraces people like IA Richards too and in particular William Empson but he also locates a key change around Julia Kristeva's Ruins of a Poetics. When you have been a distinguished academic your bird's eye view can be

Book Review

spectacular and dazzling. When you mention Derek Attridge's scope at least you know, and similar readers know, what is being implied. Kristeva forces the link back to Russian Formalism. Whether she or other excitable moments really last they enable meteoric hive minded interdisciplinary collaborations.

How Platonic are the Marxists still? Ranciere apparently disagrees with Badiou on this and Agamben is apparently very key to the present state of poetry. Norris suggests Agamben is still perhaps a bit too formalist. After this here's some shorter prose about the verse problem in Mallarme and how he is paired with Joyce. Then the first poem about this follows.

Mallarme like Derrick Attridge is not easily comprehended by everyone I guess. Yes, I know about dice games and chessboards with Cage and Duchamp and how Boulez used him in *Pli Selon Pli*. But his actual poems are not usually the centre of my attention. That limits me. I am not in the position of the author here. But symbolist painting has caught my attention recently. It's quite a long first poem. Like the Forward. This poem has references, more Philippa Gregory than Hillary Mantel.

The next piece feels like an essay but it soon breaks into verse. Again the verse is enjoyable but the technical subject could be challenging. It's an essay on rhyme itself and whatever Plato meant by Symbolon. Here Wittgenstein and Jakobsen briefly feature and Heidegger- type phrases also occur but so does Edward Lear! But it is also about the symbol allegory debate in Benjamin and de Man and how symbolism perhaps has tended to restrict the discursive debating style one had in Pope Dryden and their early models, the Roman Satirists. We meet here the broken sphere of Plato's enigmatic Symbolon not Wittgenstein's early functional idea. It's not a piece of shaker furniture - or is it? What is rhyme's eurythmic power without Annie Lennox or Rudolph Steiner. A note at the end defines hysteresis as the joint determination of future states through both its current state and a certain history of its previous states. In a different more social context I remember a talk at Oxford by Sabina Lovibond about how this idea might help understand how Bourdieu used Wittgenstein. Perhaps I was chuffed that as an engineer I knew what it was at least in electro-magnetism.

By now the reader might be thinking that this book is at the reviewer's limit. In some ways this is unavoidable. Maybe a book that involves needing curiosity and an incomplete learning curve is not for you. But the book does touch on things I am myself interested in and its certainly interesting to read what Norris thinks about these issues as far as one can. The third piece is about hinges, pivots and turning points or maybe as we say now, after Gladwell perhaps, Tipping Points. What makes the Duck suddenly look like a Rabbit again, i.e. how we perceive situations. Ectopiques is the technical term here but it's not always some dramatic paradigm shift as it could just mean an Epicurean swerve rather than a full blown flip. Maybe this is where Norris's work on Badiou comes in. Apparently, it is. But is it as radical as one expected? Norris discusses his own experience of this question at a conference. Then the poem begins. Is it too gradualist? Is it like in Woody Allen's Match Point film, all about net chords or things the police couldn't be bothered to find? Small things that change outcomes.

The fourth piece *Shifters* starts with quotes from Benveniste and Lacan. I suppose as a Ricoeurian I should be able to relate to this better. But then we are straight into the poem here. I quickly spot the theme of small changes again. Substituting I for he, you for she.

After a shorter verse ride, the notes turn





Chris Norris

Angelus Novus by Klee

quickly into something more like a (much shorter) essay. I note an absence of Ricoeur but the names are otherwise familiar. Roland Barthes is one. This leads to a fifth piece explicitly about Barthes Camera Lucida and why Studium and Punctam are not the same. The Winter Garden - I am not sure what Raymond Tallis would think about die hard structuralists reading their Lacan, Barthes and Derrida alongside a highly thumbed edition of Saussure. Is this NOT SAUSSURE again. At last there's some satire like we heard last time in café, we meet Tel Quel addicts but what is this long poem really saying about Barthes and Structuralism as old high modernism? Again, the notes are very rewarding if you are puzzled.

Hume a-dying as visited by Boswell in 1776 is the sixth piece. As one might hope it's a more accessible piece if you haven't studied much literary theory. Quite a lot of historical descriptive story telling here. Have the earlier ones been a bit abstract and conceptual? But what was Boswell's error even here.

This Be The Life is more Larkin than Deleuze I think. I get the feeling these later poems are a bit more accessible than the earlier ones. Something about not force-fitting young poets into strictly classical frames is here. Notes good as usual.

A Plain Man Looks at the Angel of History

is almost my own topic as Ricoeur ends *Memory, History, Forgetting* discussing it. It's not by a Christian Apologist though. It's not theo-politics either. It's primarily, here, about interpretation. There's a relatively short introduction. But no Rosenzwieg or Stephan Moses. Kafka wrote about angels too. So did Rilke. But here is where Norris's shattered hope reconstellates to form a fragile bond of transworld correspondences that might help us cope with all that debris. This ground hog day like Nietzsche's has no happy ending. Even the buried promise cannot be guaranteed. I like the Glass Bead Game reference and note.

Doors and Pictures in Wittgenstein. Did the picture hold us captive? Did Russell and Ogden get the *Tractatus* wrong because of their logical positivist spectacles?

The eponymous piece *The Winnowing Fan* is about Odysseus and his wanderings. Then 13 short epigrams by various philosophers are "developed" in the *Villanelle* form. We heard a selection of these on Mr Norris's previous visit and they went down well. There are some here we didn't hear. Leibniz and modal logic was one, Benjamin's Theses, Althuser, de Man, Performatives (Yeats and Heaney) goes back to the flipping or swerving theme of the third piece. Sartre's in it. *Lost for Words* is the thirteenth piece. Then a piece about Rortyean poetics.

David Clough

Point of View

Challenging Plato and his Republic A Thought Experiment About a Thought Experiment



DAVID JONES

magine that you were traveling with group of friends and you met with a man who was very old and who was aware that he was near the end of his earthly life and you asked him: 'what was it like to be at his stage of life?' The old man answered that he *felt prepared because he had paid all his debts and given to everyone what they were due*.

This answer provokes a discussion about the whole question of *paying and receiving what* is due and how to understand what people call 'justice'. Rather than just argue about the meaning of the word 'justice' it is agreed to explore 'justice' through making a 'thought experiment' by trying to imagine what a community would be like if everything was organised to prioritise 'justice' before any other desirable quality such as 'freedom'.

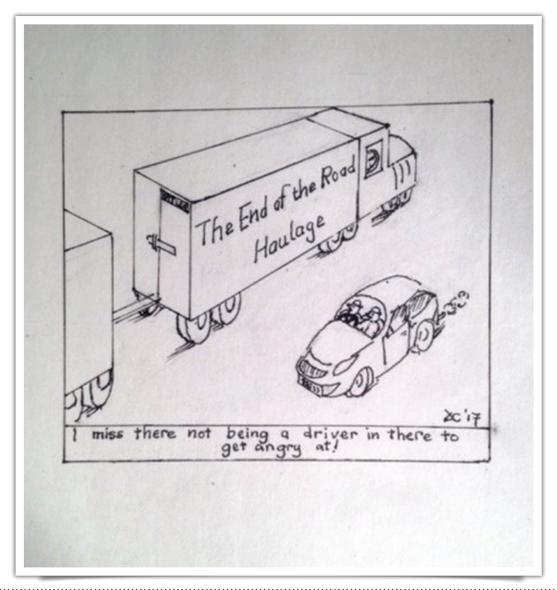
Obviously this thought experiment is purely to explore and become more clear about what 'justice' really is and it would be really ridiculous for anyone to confuse this thought experiment with a real proposal for an ideal community which, of course, would have to take into account not just one quality such as justice but many other imperatives including individual freedom, security, family life, etc and would involve a compromise between many such different desirable qualities.

The thought experiment discussion proceeds and many interesting contributions are made towards maximising justice for all including giving equal opportunities for women (which was unheard of at this time) enabling everyone to have a job doing what they were particularly good at so that everyone in the community benefited from each person's individual onesidedness and only being governed by civil servants who were very well educated but not allowed to have any family or personal assets. These so called 'guardians' were required to live in community owned premises that any member of the public could also inspect at anytime and these 'guardians' were not even allowed to own any of the furniture in the rooms where they sleep. (This seems rather extreme but it would be necessary to ensure that the ruling guardians only made decisions that are in the interest of the whole community and not themselves.)

Imagine that one of those present at this discussion about the meaning of justice found it so interesting that they wrote down the whole dialogue. Afterwards something quite unexpected happened. People read the written account of the discussion, not very carefully, and decided that it could only be interpreted as the authors political manifesto for a perfect society and proceeded to accuse the author of promoting tyranny and totalitarianism. Somehow this interpretation persisted for more than two thousand years because all through this time nobody bothered to carefully read what was said in the published account of the discussion.

'Cartoon'

By Dianne Cockburn



The Wednesday

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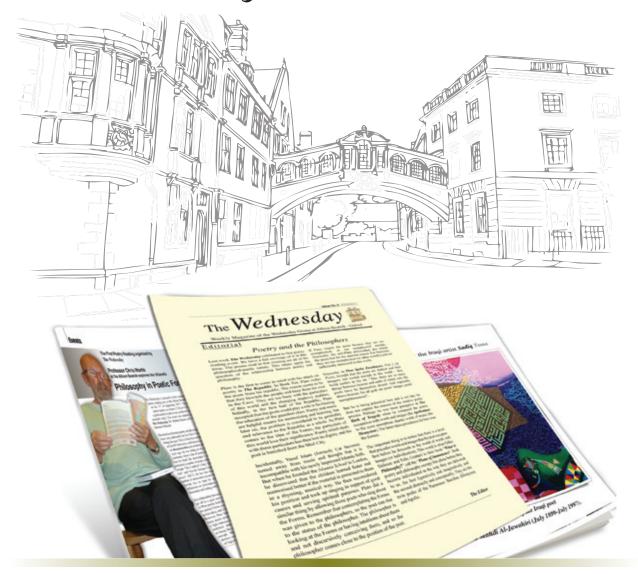
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The Wednesday

Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group at Albion Beatnik - Oxford

Written by friends.. for friends



Please keep your articles, artwork, poems and other contributions coming.

Send all your contributions and comments to the editor at:

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Visit us at AB on Wednesday afternoons

