

# The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group at Albion Beatnik - Oxford

## Editorial

### *Clarity, Vagueness, and Creativity*

**D**o we need clarity or do we need vagueness? This question is asked in the context of comparing science and philosophy, or within philosophy itself by comparing continental and analytic philosophy. Science is more precise and open for verification through experiments. Philosophy is more speculative and could be vague. Analytical philosophy which allies itself with science opts for clarifying concepts and language and eliminating all residues of vague metaphysical, speculative thought. This definitely has some advantage. We need to be clear about that which we are thinking about. But is it really as advantageous as it sounds? One philosopher who rejected this idea was Whitehead. He rejected it in the name of creativity.

The point Whitehead makes is that for novelty and creativity we need a vagueness that generate more ideas in the process of becoming clear. Total clarity is not the aim. We need to keep a reservoir of vagueness to generate the dynamo for novelty and creativity. Perhaps this realm of vagueness is the realm of imagination that poetry relies on. But the scientist and any creative philosopher, of the analytic or continental school, needs to explore it too.

The late Egyptian scholar Abdul-Rahman Badawi once compared Plato and Aristotle. He thought that Plato was close to the spirit that gives rise to a culture (i.e. creative) with his vague ideas that needed refinement and development, while Aristotle's ideas show the technical development rather than a new vision. He saw in Aristotle the exhaustion of the spirit of Greek civilisation that had reached its summit and was flattening out before the decline set in.

In our time, both aspects seem to be present. Plato could represent all the speculative philosophy in the continental tradition while Aristotle, with his strict logic, is dominant in the analytical school. The former is characterised by vagueness but always presenting us with useful and visionary concepts while the latter is more formal, logical and narrow in its scope. It tends to be technical and in its technicalities, kills the spirit! In the saying of the French artist Georges Braque: "Proofs weary the truth."

But vagueness is not a muddle, though there exists a general impression of it with regard to continental philosophy. However, reading Bachelard's *Poetics of a Space*, for example, is a very enjoyable experience. There is no muddle in his thinking but there is a subtlety and wholeness. Nietzsche is another example. He speaks in a hyperbolic tone but this does not vitiate his argument. He may be trying to express and bring emotional engagement to bear on what he says.

We encounter vagueness in the power of certain ideas in major philosophers that generates a continuing debate and encourages creativity. This is perhaps a good description of what happened in Germany to Kant's ideas, and generated a half century of new thought. I also suggest that these ideas were latent within this group of thinkers or 'in the air' as they say, and the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and other works by Kant, especially the *Critique of Judgment*, gave them the necessary energy to burst to the surface. Hopefully this will happen all the time and will keep creativity on the march.

*The Editor*

# Nietzsche and Nihilism:

## A Philosophy for the Future

The question of decadence and nihilism is prominent in Nietzsche's thought. It can be seen in his writing since his first book *Birth of Tragedy*. While decadence is dealt with in the early works, it is in his posthumous notes, published in a book format as *Will to Power*, that Nietzsche dealt with nihilism in detail. Here is a look at nihilism and what it meant for Nietzsche:

RAHIM HASSAN

### Part-I

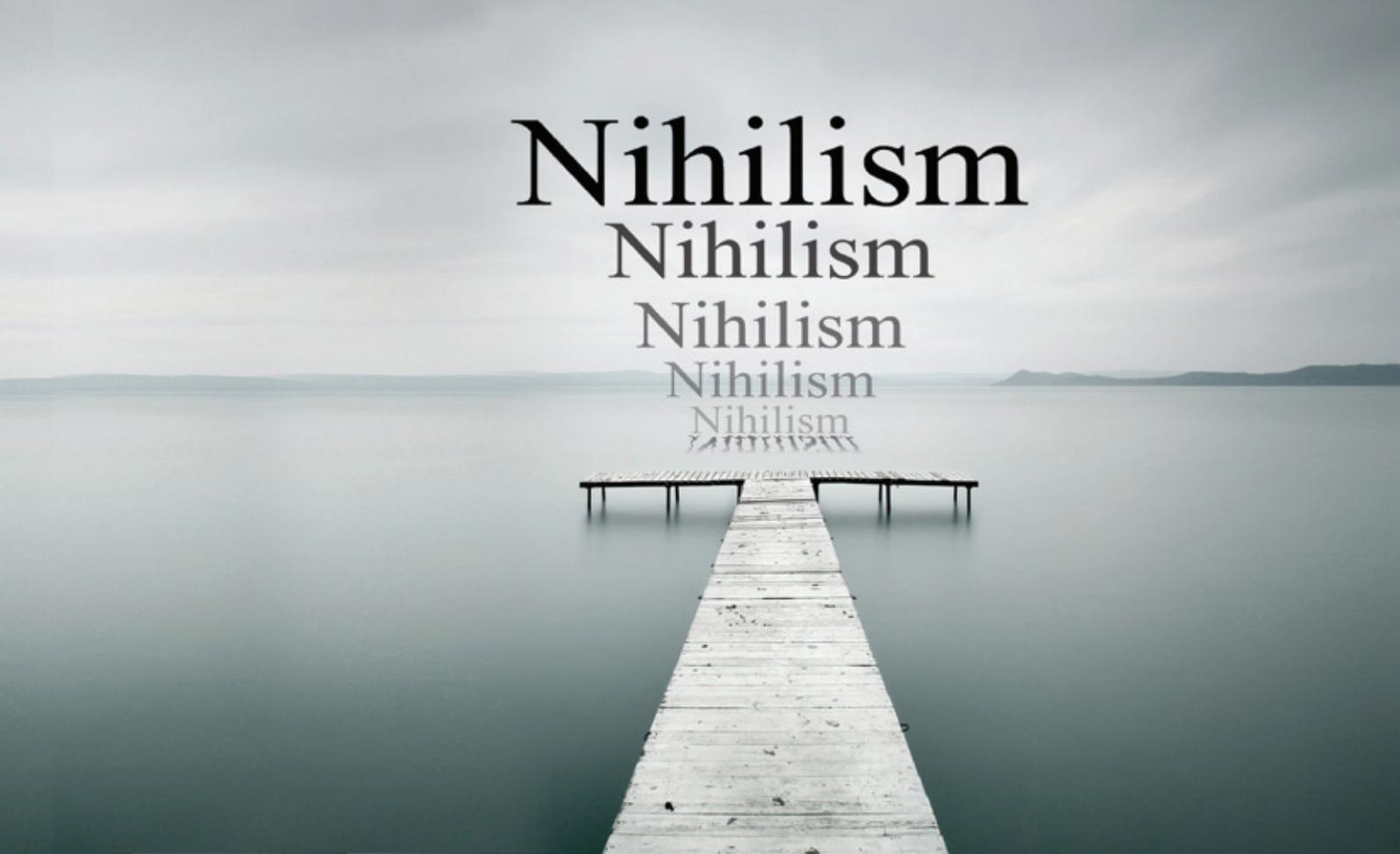
Heidegger thinks that there are five interlinked concepts and that "each portrays Nietzsche's metaphysics from just one perspective, although in each case it is a perspective that defines the whole." (Heidegger, Nietzsche, Vol. 4, P9). They are: nihilism, revaluation of all values hitherto, will to power, eternal recurrence of the same and the overman (Übermensch). Nihilism then is an important concept for Nietzsche.

Nietzsche goes deep in his analysis of nihilism and attributes it to many factors, religious, scientific and physiological weakness. His arguments seem to demolish our view of the world, morality and our concepts about ourselves. His ideas are not only shocking but they may seem implausible. For example, he attacks Truth, strictly speaking the Unconditional Truth, and considers it other-worldly and a relic of the Platonic concept of reality.

He also attacks facts saying that there are no facts but only interpretations. He attacks logic, reason and the 'subject' (or the ego).

This has generated several responses to his thought. The continental, post-modern view picks up on irrationality and the decentralisation of the subject. In the analytical school of philosophy, Nietzsche's thought gained respectability by taking away its sting and accommodating it within the general tradition of philosophy, especially ethics, hence the great interest in his *Genealogy of Morals*.

A more reasonable approach has been presented by Vattimo who thinks, just as Nietzsche did, that Nihilism is a positive development, since it unanchored our morality, identities and truths from any beyond. Nihilism, in his view, opened the way to a diversity of interpretation and made us look at our



# Nihilism

## Nihilism

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#### Nihilism

##### Nihilism

thoughts not as eternal certainties but as *weak thoughts*. They have limited validity and they can evolve through dialogue (Similar ideas can be found in Lyotard writing about the disappearance of *Grand Narratives*).

perhaps we need all these readings of Nietzsche if we want to genuinely learn anything from him. We need to read Nietzsche to understand the post-modern age, and this alone should be a good reason to engage with his thought. But we also need to engage with what he says to construct his thoughts in the most plausible way if they are to be useful.

Nihilism, as a word, has not been coined by Nietzsche and it is not original. It was attributed to Jacobi who thought that the insistence on rationality in the search for a ground for our knowledge will lead to nothingness and hence to absence of any belief or nihilism. Jacobi saw it in the debate on atheism at the end of the eighteenth century.

Nietzsche saw it in the light of his thought about the Death of God and the rise of materi-

alism, which is similar to the atheism debate. But the originality of Nietzsche is that he analysed it in a wider context, beyond the realm of ideas and seeing it in the weakening of the European character. The concept becomes for him essential and connected it to his entire thought.

### **What is Nihilism?**

Nietzsche gave some definition of nihilism, such as:

“What does nihilism mean? That the highest values devaluate themselves. The aim is lacking; “why?” finds no answer.” (Will to Power, 2). With this, suffering comes to the fore. It is not the suffering as such but the meaning of suffering. Religion used to provide that meaning but there is nothing available now to take its place and bestow the necessary meaning:

“The meaninglessness of suffering, not suffering itself, was the curse which hitherto lay spread out over mankind – and the ascetic ideal offered mankind meaning.” (GM, 28)

Heidegger deals with the Nietzsche and nihil-

ism extensively in the fourth volume of his lectures on Nietzsche. Here he gives a succinct definition of what Nietzsche means by nihilism:

“Nihilism” is the increasingly dominant truth that all prior aims of being have become superfluous.’ (Heidegger: Nietzsche, Vol. 4, P5).

### Why did Nihilism come about?

Nietzsche gives some *philosophical explanations*, such as the Death of God due to the rise of modern science and materialism. The entire history of Western philosophy, in his view, leads to the Death of God (See: *How the True World Finally became a Fable*, in *Twilight of the Idols*). Nietzsche also attributes the dismissing of the belief in God to the honesty of Christianity and the Ascetic Ideal (i.e. The emphasis on the Unconditional Truth) which led to the conclusion that its metaphysics and the morality built on it are false. This reflects itself in the end of metaphysics, the dismissal of Plato, and by extension Christianity (“for Christianity is Platonism for “the people”) (*Beyond Good and Evil*, Preface), and also to the rejection of a world beyond as conceived by religion, and the demolition of Kant’s idea of ‘the world in itself’. There is then, for Nietzsche, no beyond, neither in the religious conception nor the philosophy of Kant.

But for Nietzsche, Nihilism is also a philosophical problem because it has not been thought out philosophically in a proper manner. The “passive” nihilist (modern man or the last man, as he calls him in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*) has not thought nihilism through, has not discovered its full implications and the new horizon it opens up. He has been caught up in a present that is decadent and nihilistic without thinking it through to its end. Nietzsche thought that he was going to do that in his last writing project *The Revaluation of*

*all Value* and so regenerate European civilization. It seems that he opted in his last work for hard thinking, unlike his first book on the *Birth of Tragedy* where he thought music, and Wagnerian music to be exact, could do that. He had not completed the work when he had a mental collapse, but did leave behind some interesting notes.

He also gives a *physiological explanation*. Nihilism, for him, is a kind of exhaustion and a weakening of the will. ‘The nihilistic movement is merely the expression of physiological decadence’ (WP, 38). ‘The higher species is lacking’ (WP, 27). This comes about because ‘the mass is dominant and bullies the exceptions, so they lose their faith in themselves and become nihilists.’ (WP, 27). The last statement could be taken as a social and psychological observation.

He also gives a mixture of philosophical insight and psychological observation. He relates nihilism to pessimism: ‘Is pessimism necessarily a sign of decline, decay, degeneration, weary and weak instincts – as it once was in India and now is, to all appearances, among us, “modern” men and Europeans? Is there pessimism of *strength*? An intellectual predilection for the hard, gruesome, evil, problematic aspect of *fullness* of existence?’ (Attempt at a self-criticism, 1, publish in *Birth of Tragedy*, see also, *We Antipodes*, in *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*).

Finally, he gives *moral reasons*. The nature of the modern human being is like an original text that has been given too many interpretations. These lead him into chaos in his life. He has too many drives that he cannot control or put into the service of a clear project. *The Last Man* is the nihilist who has lived through the event of the death of God but instead of making himself a god he has stayed small: ‘The earth become small, and on it hops the last man, who makes everything small.’ And ‘Give

us this last man, O Zarathustra,' they shouted. 'Turn us into these last men! Then we shall make you a gift of the overman!' (Z, I, 5).

### Elaboration of the above

1. Modernity stands for a belief in rationality, progress and the power of science (mainly natural science although Nietzsche's criticism includes scholarship in general).

2. There is a mixed reaction to modernity; the optimistic one sees in science a new age; the pessimistic sees only pessimism and nihilism.

3. Nietzsche is not happy with either reaction. He sees both as examples of what he called the "Ascetic Ideal," the giving up on life. You give up on life by dedicating yourself to a limited sphere of life as scholars and scientists do, or because you are too pessimistic.

4. What he thought is that life, at roots, is tragic and irrational.

5. The tragic life is shrouded in myths and gave rise to tragic heroes. He saw that in the early Greek poets, pre-Socratic philosophers and the Greek tragedy. What came out of that was classical culture and taste. There was a 'Style', something that nineteenth century European (particularly German) culture lacks. (The best statements of his critique of German and European culture can be found in his *Untimely Meditations*).

6. The tragic hero, represented for Nietzsche in the figure of Dionysus, sees the essence of life as a tragic chaos, but doesn't run away. He affirms life and works towards its enhancement. There is in his character and life strong passions and emphasis on the senses. The world for him is this world, the world of becoming and not the world of being.

7. With Socrates and Plato, man became



Nietzsche

more rational and theoretical. The world itself suffered a negation and degradation. It is now the world beyond, the world of being that gets the attention of the philosopher. It is a time of rationalising the world of becoming into a world of being. The tragic hero is in decline, or even disappearing.

8. The decline continues and is universalised through the Christian (religious) picture of the world, with the belief in God, the birth of the 'sovereign individual' who has been endowed with reason, free will, and a sense of guilt. The individual is threatened with eternal punishment and always in need of priests.

9. The Christian (religious) morality is one

of belief in God, denial of the world of becoming, and impoverishment of life through its negative attitude towards the world of the senses.

10. This Christian morality is 'unnatural' since it fights the instincts and what is natural in humanity. (WP, 918 'One would make a fit little boy stare if one asked him: "Would you like to become virtuous?" – but he will open his eyes if asked: "Would you like to become stronger than your friends?"')

11. Life itself is will to power, both in the ontological sense (what the world is in itself) and the psychological sense (the feeling of power).

12. Morality is based on power. There are types of morality. Natural morality evaluates actions and people in terms of good, or what is suitable for the master and applies to what he does, and bad which is what the master despises. The other morality is the one that came with religion and it evaluates actions and people in terms of good and evil. Here is added a layer of evaluation. Evil enters the picture. But Nietzsche maintains that evil is just a projection by the weak and not a bad value in itself. The first morality is active while the second is reactive and full of resentment. We can define the two types of moralities according to their power relations, the strong morality belongs to the master class, and the weak morality to the slave masses. The master morality is based on being able to exact revenge if you have been injured by someone; the weak morality is based on resentment and imaginary revenge. The strong character (and morality) is based on strong, controlled passions and delayed reactions while the weak character (and morality) is based on getting rid of the passions and on the readiness to react.

13. Christianity (religion) changed this picture by making the slaves good and the masters bad. Ultimately this led to democracy and socialism, or

the herd morality.

14. Christianity, in Nietzsche's view, is based on Platonism and the belief in the unconditional good and the unconditional truth drive. But everything in this life, including the concept of the good is conditioned and the truth-drive demands, out of honesty, perhaps due to Christianity, that the truth of Christianity itself be investigated.

15. The truth-drive, represented by its last moment of the nineteenth century (science) leads to the discovery of the falsification of Christianity – the Death of God thesis.

16. The devaluation of God implies the devaluation of meaning and human beings themselves. Life is not justified any more. The ascetic ideal built a morality that gave meaning to life but that ideal is not viable any more.

17. The replacement of the old metaphysic is the new science but science is not a help. First, it leads to the belittlement of Humanity itself. A Person is devalued, or put back in nature, as Nietzsche says, put back with the animals. Second, science does not present values; it is busy pursuing facts. Third, science's ideal is the theoretical individual who lacks will and actions.

18. The modern man (Last Man) is living a life that ignores the significance of a major event in human history and that is the Death of God. He also lives an impoverished life and seeks a justification of life in work, family commitments, science, *l'art pour l'art*. He has a weak character that lives a life of decadence leading to pessimism and nihilism.

Nietzsche seems to have a deep understanding of the roots of nihilism and the different facets of it in his time, and may our time as well, but how does he see the solution? That will be the question for the second and final part of this article.

**Creative** Art

*'Oxford: The Bridge of Sighs' by the Polish artist Monika Filipek.*



## Events

# *The Winnowing Fan* Launched at Albion Beatnik

## Chris Norris reads from his new poetry collection

DAVID CLOUGH

Professor Chris Norris launched his new poetry collection at the Albion Beatnik Bookstore. It was attended by small but enthusiastic group of people who are interested in poetry and philosophy.

Chris Norris talked about giving up on discursive essays and opting for the form of poetry as a means of reflecting on philosophy. He started doing so when he retired this year and he discovered how the rhyming of poetry could push the poet into meanings that he didn't intend originally. It is a way of experimenting with form and ideas.

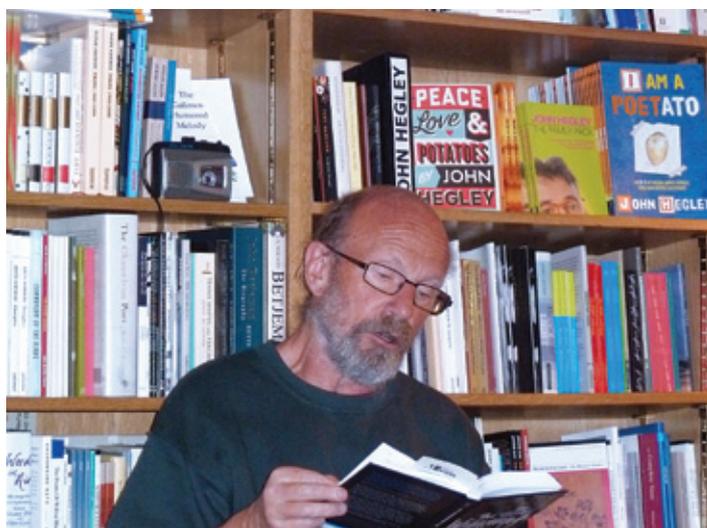
Norris read eight of his poems and his partner Val read two more, published separately from the present collection. His poems included one on Wittgenstein (on the limits of language), Adorno (on particulars and universals), Time (between the experiential and the mathematical approaches), Mallarme (reflections on his famous poem *The Throw of the Dice*), Realist and Anti-Realist about

atoms, Badiou, Paul de Man, Benjamin (and the *Angel of History*), Althusser and Lacan.

Below is a personal take on the evening:

Norris has read Rorty's essay "Trotzky and Wild Orchids" which displays a Kierkegaardian tension of ethical and political commitments versus pure aesthetic enjoyment or pleasure, while his tragically-minded critic Adorno advocated an even more convoluted thinking against itself in his *Negative Dialectics*. Hope in ruins can only be fragmentary. Some of this comes in to how we read the still slightly more mythic world of Benjamin. With Rorty the line about letting language take the strain feels uncomfortable today but none of which should be laid at the door of either Rorty or the poet. But where live speech seems alive and taking flight, the written version later looks almost, if not quite, dead on the page.

After the poem on de Man, the poetic accounts of Benjamin and Althusser seemed more genuinely tragic. Benjamin in a kind of permanent exile dies on the border while Althusser followed the Italian



Chris Norris





From left: Fred Cousins, David Clough and Ray Ellison



Val Norris



Dianne Cockburn

composer Gesualdo in murdering his wife, though it may have been semi-accidental. But when he returned to philosophy later on he turned to Lucretius and the idea of swerving atoms.

The poem on Lacan, after Benjamin's Angel, was almost idyllic. Anyway, we seemed to journey from Mallarme's dice game to these swerving atoms without reference to Blochian conversations bifurcating like Deleuzian trees. Down with trees but up with rhizomes that poem had seemed to say but didn't.

Then we move to Badiou. According to Badiou, when truth meets knowledge it punches some kind of hole. This I then supposed was an event. All very seemingly trenchant these epicurean detours even if it's really from late Althusser and his swerving atoms. Even when some kind of truth is speaking, who is actually being addressed? Time was when the structuralist constructivist could argue that we were all part of something like the modernist grid of Mondrian, all urban, artificial and anti-pastoral, which left us just wriggle-room in a cage of this type. So, does Badiou then think we can punch somehow through these walls again above our weight as it were? Apparently, Norris says in one of his notes to the poem in the published form, that the late Sartre of the Critique of Dialectic Reason period was also good at outlining the uncertainty not just of whether language was both good and bad in its effects but the unpredictability of political action. Can some unintended effects be good? We know some which lie outside what Koselleck calls *the horizon of expectation* in utopian planning often seem less desirable but unavoidable. Then there's Nussbaum and Bernard Williams and Moral luck perhaps; the things unnoticed.

### Death in the poetic act

Maybe when Mallarme stopped poetry from being about propositional argument it lost its didactic function and started instead to be an aesthetic object in itself on the page, as in Cage's colourings of Webern scores. Spatial layout and gaps become almost the most important aspect in this respect.

Going back to the poem *Meetings with Mallarme*, De Man and Mallarme it seemed were both fascinated by the ruins of Hegelian dialectic, though it is unlikely this will be something analytical philosophy will be much interested in. In de Man's early thesis, the poet must come to terms with his "death" in his poetic act. A necessary death in balsamic juice, but a more Jungian analysis of being suspended between paternal and maternal aspects of the symbolic order. But is this notion of poetic suicide rather overdone in *Herodiade* (a poem by Mallarme)? Does another kind of indestructible temporality really emerge from this? See how in Mallarme's poem *Tombeau of Edgar Allan Poe* when consciousness universalises itself it becomes thingy, then fades to an increasingly abstract figure. Traumatic tears in De Man's 1979 essay *Shelley Disfigured* become mawkish jewels because of a failure to progress dialectically from self to poem.

These are lurid transformations, more petrification than electrification, both open yet also claustrophobic. Bennington said that it is the plurality of semantic reference that sunders platonic mimesis. Ian Hacking's Representing and Intervening around Heisenberg and the vulnerability of personal memory. When images degrade and atoms start to fade.

# Deus sive Natura (Spinoza)

CHRIS NORRIS



I have labored carefully, not to mock, lament, or execrate human actions, but to understand them; and, to this end, I have looked upon passions, such as love, hatred, anger, envy, ambition, pity, and the other perturbations of the mind, not in the light of vices of human nature, but as properties, just as pertinent to it, as are heat, cold, storm, thunder, and the like to the nature of the atmosphere, which phenomena, though inconvenient, are yet necessary, and have fixed causes, by means of which we endeavour to understand their nature. (Spinoza, Political Treatise).

No one else during the century 1650–1750 remotely rivaled Spinoza’s notoriety as the chief challenger of the fundamentals of revealed religion, received ideas, tradition, morality, and what was everywhere regarded, in absolutist and non-absolutist states alike, as divinely constituted political authority. (Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750*).

I am utterly amazed, utterly enchanted! I have a precursor, and what a precursor! I hardly knew Spinoza: that I should have turned to him just now, was inspired by ‘instinct’. Not only is his over-tendency like mine – namely, to make all knowledge the *most powerful* affect – but in five main points of his doctrine I recognize myself; this most unusual and loneliest thinker is closest to me precisely in these matters: he denies the freedom of the will, teleology, the moral world-order, the unegoistic, and evil. (Friedrich Nietzsche, postcard to Franz Overbeck)

I believe in Spinoza’s God, who reveals himself in the lawful harmony of the world, not in a God who concerns himself with the fate and the doings of mankind. (Albert Einstein).

Pure immanence, no thought of worlds elsewhere;  
Mere superstition to think otherwise.  
What price your mind-stuff minus body's share?

Yet I misspeak myself: to say that they're  
Close kin's just two-bit Descartes in disguise.  
Pure immanence, no thought of worlds elsewhere.

Try as you might to reunite that pair  
Still my reproach to his sad ghost applies:  
What price your mind-stuff minus body's share?

Though Platonists dreamed of a matter rare  
Or superfine as soul, their dream-talk lies:  
Pure immanence, no thought of worlds elsewhere.

The trouble is, those crypto-dualists care  
Above all to revile my dread surmise:  
What price your soul-stuff minus body's share?

'Deus sive natura': they can't bear  
To think just what that phrase of mine implies:  
Pure immanence, no thought of worlds elsewhere.

It's why the rabbis and the priests declare  
Me heretic - for venturing to advise  
'What price your soul-stuff minus body's share?'

They deem this doctrine one that's sure to square  
With thinking soul as well as body dies:  
Pure immanence, no thought of worlds elsewhere.

Still those there are who count it all hot air,  
That soul-talk, yet whose spirits touch the skies:  
What price your soul-stuff minus body's share?

And those there'll be with soulful thoughts to spare,  
Like sage Novalis, who'll soon recognize  
Pure immanence, no thought of worlds elsewhere.



Spinoza

'A God-intoxicated mystic': there  
You have me, Saint Spinoza in his eyes;  
What price your soul-stuff minus body's share?

If truth be told, both parties greatly err  
Though naught's to gain by talk of compromise:  
Pure immanence, no thought of worlds elsewhere.

It's this root principle for which I'll dare  
Disturb the peaceful way of life I prize:  
What price your soul-stuff minus body's share?

'Ultimi barbarorum!': my one flare-  
Up moment when the mob made hackles rise.  
Pure immanence, no thought of worlds elsewhere.

They killed my patron, dragged him by the hair,  
But let's cut all this sin-talk down to size:  
What price your soul-stuff minus body's share?

The elders ask me: which God hears your prayer,  
Christian, or Jewish? but I'll not baptize  
Pure immanence: no thought of worlds elsewhere.

My revolution's long Eighteenth Brumaire  
Is that which comes around when no one cries  
'What price your soul-stuff minus body's share?'

Fast forward now and witness how *l'affaire*  
*Spinoziste* gives enlighteners their highs:  
Pure immanence, no thought of worlds elsewhere.

Yet it's a curse, this shockwave power to scare  
That every call of kind and kin defies.  
What price your soul-stuff minus body's share?

'Ecrasez l'infâme': fine for bold Voltaire  
In time to come, but I'm the first who tries  
Pure immanence, no thought of worlds elsewhere.

'Of all great thinkers the least doctrinaire'  
They'll say, though here's one tag to memorise:  
What price your soul-stuff minus body's share?

Fast forward again: see how the god-squad snare  
Us with their latest test-of-faith surprise.  
Pure immanence, no dream of worlds elsewhere.

Still, let's not say their tactics are unfair  
When immanence with faith so boldly vies:  
What price your soul-stuff minus body's share?

Almost we'll need a covert *nom-de-guerre*,  
Us Spinozists, if we're to exercise  
Pure immanence, no dream of worlds elsewhere.

Yet times there'll be when world-reformers swear  
By us and our faith-shaking enterprise:  
What price your soul-stuff minus body's share?

Let their reproaches and abuse run ne'er  
So high, still our composure signifies  
Pure immanence, no dream of worlds elsewhere.

Now I sit low on my lens-grinder's chair  
As shredded lungs my choice of trade chastise.  
'What price your soul-stuff minus body's share?'

The clerics taunt me like a tethered bear  
Though I think cheerfully of my demise:  
Pure immanence, no dream of worlds elsewhere.

And should you deem it reason for despair,  
This thought of mine, then let me emphasize:  
What price your soul-stuff minus body's share?  
Pure immanence, no thought of worlds elsewhere.

# *Tuoni e fulmini in Siracusa!*

BARBARA VELLACOTT

*There was no possibility of going out that morning as, directly overhead, lightning flashed, and thunder crashed. We lingered over breakfast in our little hotel, reading *The Observer* on the i-pad.*

*But the violence of the storm and rain hammering down in the narrow street just outside our window took me back in time to distant ages, invasions, conquests, destruction and rebuilding.*

Putting out from south-eastern Sicily into the Ionian Sea, Siracusa was supreme in the Mediterranean under a succession of tyrants for a long time (circa 480 – 215 BC). Its position and importance made it subject to a succession of invasions and colonisations. Over the centuries conquerors, often preceded by traders, swept across from Greece, Rome, Constantinople, Arab North Africa, and later from the north (the Normans). After the Norman invasion in 1061

there followed periods of Imperial, Spanish and Austrian rule, Sicily becoming part of a united Italy in 1860.

A brief paragraph like this can only imply the momentous or complex nature of the changes and the qualities of the cultures that were brought, so here are a few vignettes.

Archimedes, the great mathematician,



The cathedral in Siracusa



The Gran Caffè Cuomo, Siracusa, opposite the cathedral



The Ionian Sea from Siracusa. The harbour is behind the rampart on the right

scientist and thinker of ancient times (287 – 212 BC) was credited with inventing machines to defend Siracusa when it was besieged for two years by the Romans. Unhappily for him, this man of the famous ‘eureka’ moment was hacked to death when the city fell to the Romans in 211.

Siracusa was briefly the centre of Eastern Christianity when the Byzantine court moved there in 663 AD. You can see signs of it in the massive Byzantine nave of the duomo – the *Cattedrale della Nativita di Maria Santissima* – which incorporated in its north wall the fluted Doric columns of the fifth century temple to Athena. However, an Arab invasion from North Africa in the early ninth century virtually destroyed Siracusa and the inhabitants were massacred.

The Arabs brought gardens, palaces, mosques, new irrigation methods and crops to Sicily, and there was religious toleration for the two hundred years or so of their rule. Since Arab domination lasted that long, you might expect more signs of Islamic influence than are visible, but Islam in Sicily was virtually eradicated by 1300 as the Roman Catholic Church became dominant for several centuries. Even now, although the second largest religion in Italy, Islam is not officially recognised. Much of Siracusa was destroyed or badly

damaged in the huge earthquake of 1693. The result for a number of towns in south-eastern Sicily, like Modica and Noto, was that they were completely rebuilt in elegant Italian Baroque style and are World Heritage sites. The badly damaged cathedral in Siracusa was rebuilt at the front with an opulent Baroque façade.

We have been into an utterly beautiful and simple church dedicated to Mary. Its marble and plaster was in gentle cream, grey and white, and it held peace and profound silence. A fairly young man, obviously in deep distress, was prostrated on the altar steps. A nun sat in the nave praying. We sat quietly for some time. ....

*The rain has cleared, and here we sit in the Gran Caffè Duomo, contemplating the present scene: tourists consuming giant chocolate-coated cream buns and coffee, with little packets of sugar, and the view of the duomo with its confident Catholic portico and Corinthian columns.*

*Il sole has returned and we venture out into the present moment of Siracusa.*

**Barbara Vellacott, 24 September 2017**

*PS. I wrote this in the Gran Caffè on a few of its flimsy paper napkins.*

## Letter from the Editor

The normal practice in the newspapers and magazines is that there is a section called “Letters to the Editor”. I am going to change this for once in this issue and put a “Letter from the Editor”. My reason for doing so is that *The Wednesday* has passed through the three-months mile-stone. It is gaining more momentum – more writers and more readers. Three months ago, it was a leap into the unknown. But now it is a reality. We have achieved a lot within these three months. We have issued the experimental zero issue, followed by twelve more issues. We have also organised two poetry readings, thanks to the help and participation of Professor Chris Norris and the Albion Beatnik Bookstore in Oxford. We are planning to organise some more poetry readings in the near future. The work on the website is an ongoing project and progressing. I sincerely thank all those who contributed so far and everyone who helped. I just want to highlight a few things:

- The magazine is the voice of the group

that meets every Wednesday at the Albion Beatnik Bookstore and it is the platform for their debate. But it is also a magazine for the whole world of intellectual and artistic activity. However, the group will remain the dynamo behind it and the magazine will continue to be the vehicle for expressing its members’ intellectual and artistic energy.

- The group was formed initially for friendly discussion between individuals with diverse interests; mainly philosophy. Poetry came to claim its place and so did art. There is a variety of views within the group on philosophy, poetry and art. I think this diversity is a source of the vitality and supports creativity.
- The nature of the debate is conversational and my wish is that this should extend to the magazine itself. I do expect that our readers to make their own contributions by engaging with our writers, com-



The poetry reading event

menting on the articles and entering into a fruitful debate with them. It is my belief that writers nowadays are more accessible since you can always write back rather than just receive views and information passively.

- I am really grateful for the friends who stood by the magazine from day one, encouraging and supporting. If I am going to mention one it would be **Dennis Harrison** who wrote at an early stage of the life of **The Wednesday** on his **Albion Beatnik** Face Book page the following:

“**The Wednesday at Albion-Oxford**” is a new and at the moment weekly magazine, A4, 16pp, produced by a philosophy discussion group that meets at the **Albion Beatnik Bookstore** for Hegelian tea, empirical cake and chat, all-embracing and inclusive of all who attend (usually 6 or 7), each Wednesday from about 3:30pm, but the timing is rather loose and occasionally they overstay long enough to be prised from their chairs when I call time.”

It is edited by **Rahim Hassan**, who will welcome submissions from all, attendees or not, and submissions may vary from what (philosophically) is to do with a piece of string, to an essay on ‘Hardenberg’s Mathematical Potentization of the Imagination’, both of which seem to tie me in knots. Jolly good stuff, do



Youngest reader of the first issue

come and join them for relaxed beverage, swiss roll and footnotes.

**If you want the magazine sent to you in pdf format, do contact Rahim on:**  
[rahimhassan@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:rahimhassan@hotmail.co.uk)”

Thank you all.

*The Editor*

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## *The Wednesday*

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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:  
***rahimhassan@hotmail.co.uk***

**Visit us at AB on Wednesday afternoons**

