

# The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group at Albion Beatnik - Oxford

## Editorial

### *Experimental Thoughts*

I had a phone call from an academic friend. He was impressed by **The *Wednesday*** magazine and used terms of praise that were normally proper for evaluating an academic journal, such as being ‘very rigorous’, ‘well adjudicated’, as if it had a couple of professors and lecturers on or as advisers to the editorial board. I was a bit horrified. All his descriptions might be well and suit an academic journal but that is not what we set out to create here. We don’t look for lists of references and footnotes. What we really intend is a platform for friends and readers to experiment with their thoughts, or, as they say, ‘sound out their ideas’ and listen to the echoes that come from different directions.

This is not the first experiment in such a philosophy magazine. The German Romantics tried it with their different styles of sounding out their ideas. They called them: ‘Fragments’, ‘Ideas’, ‘Aphorisms’. Our own writer, David Jones, alluded to this a few issues back when he said that he intended his ideas to be seeds and not pieces of wood. ‘The aim is to offer a potent seed which can come to life and grow within the soul of the reader. This “gardener” method is the opposite of the “carpenter” method which starts with something that is already dead and creates form by cutting pieces off.’ I believe this is true of the writer as well. He experiments with his thoughts to generate more thought or develop the ones he has already.

I have been attending the new series of meetings of the German Philosophy Seminar at the Senate House of London University. The theme this year is *Music and Marxism* and it is dedicated to the

exploration of the idea of the materiality of music. It ‘explores critical encounters between music history and historical materialism in an interdisciplinary way’. As such, it asks what musicology could still learn from the central insights of Marx and Marxism and to what extent music and historical materialism can even be ‘thought together’ as the summary of the Seminar states it. But some were left unhappy about ‘the reading of theoretical and philosophical texts in new, sometimes *provocative juxtaposition* with music history sources and secondary musicological literature.’ But that is the very nature of the Seminar, as was pointed out by Dr. Johan Siebers in a reply to an objection. These are experimental, and not finished and dead thoughts. I feel on these occasions in total sympathy with Walter Benjamin when he wrote his Habilitation thesis on *The Origin of The German Trauerspiel* but had to withdraw it because the established ‘academia’ did not understand his new ideas. It needed several decades before it became a text taught at the universities across the world in spite of the early rejection.

Novelty and creativity are not expected from an environment of pedantic analysis and minute observation. They don’t also come from the established order. They fight their way in from the margins. This is true of philosophy as it is also true of art, literature, theatre and other creative activities. They represent some kind of play, or in Nietzsche’s terms ‘Joyful Science’ – one that doesn’t regard its results and theories as final but only experiments on the way to further and higher truths.

***The Editor***

# Competition for raw materials is the source of conflict not 'unsociable Sociability'

*A reply to: What can Kant's concept of history teach us today?*

RAYMOND ELLISON

I refer to Terence Thomson's recent article in issue 9 of **The Wednesday** (20/9/2017) concerning a short piece of political philosophy written by Immanuel Kant in 1784. Thomson asks us whether Kant's concept of history can teach us anything about today's world. I would suggest the answer is precious little. According to Thomson:

"In Proposition Four of Kant's article, a notion which has since been named the 'cunning of nature' (due to its similarities with Hegel's 'cunning of reason') is defined. The cunning of nature involves a feature of human social interaction Kant calls

'unsociable sociability,' which he defines as the human being's 'tendency to enter into society, a tendency connected, however, with a constant resistance that continually threatens to break up this society.' [...] Kant attributes a lot to this concept in that it is the source of all human conflict, even attributing global conflict between states as emanating from unsociable sociability. Countries enter into antagonism with each other through the mechanism of unsociable behaviour, breaking the sociable links that might have been resulting in a state of war. [...] Kant also attributes historical progression to this concept, which means that it is

**The Progressive Role of 'Unsociable Sociability'**

**What Can Kant's Concept Of History Teach Us Today?**

TERENCE THOMSON  
CHMP London, (terencechmp@gmail.com)

Immanuel Kant

Does Kant have a concept of history? Can it teach us anything about the world we inhabit today? The following article suggests that Kant does have a philosophy of history, which is modern and relevant to the political situation today.

In philosophy departments across the world Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, as well as his prominent moral works are analysed, discussed, and often despised over by students and scholars alike. His 'critical philosophy' has been written about in essays and articles in all parts of the publishing industry and even referenced in popular films (*Superman II* gives a nod to *Critique of Pure Reason* in one of its scenes). Yet his philosophy of history remains controversial and largely ignored, leading us to ask: does Kant have a concept of history and can it teach us anything about the world we inhabit today? I'd like to briefly suggest that Kant does have a philosophy of history, which is actually quite modern and that it can teach us something about the political situation today.

In 1784, three years after the publication of *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant published a curious article in a prominent intellectual newspaper entitled, *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective*. Made up of nine 'propositions', the article attempted to outline the necessary elements a future historian would have to consider if s/he wanted to compile a universal history of past human actions. This may not seem like such a curious idea today as we see this type of history frequently published with various subjects as their catalyst (e.g., Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel* and Harari's *Sapiens* – these are both attempts to construct a universal history from a particular point of view). But what is curious about Kant's little article is its discussion of conflict in human history, as well as nature's role in such conflicts.

Our age is increasingly defined by a wide array of conflicts, whether military conflict, digital conflict or even conflict which straddles both of these elements such as the military use of drones. Even jostling on the packed bus or train for a better place can be read as a form of social conflict. Modern terrorism in all of its appearances can also be considered under this rubric: an element of everyday life for many in the Middle East and one that increasingly dominates American and European consciousness. Whilst it is true that Kant could never have foreseen a situation where conflict is so multifarious, his concept

of history may still be able to tell us something about these conflicts. In Kant's view history tells us that conflict is not simply a set of randomly occurring mindless acts, nor is it a sign that we are unavoidably heading toward an apocalyptic nightmare. Rather, there is something integral at play in conflicts no matter how multifarious they are and in what context they appear.

In Proposition Four of Kant's article, a notion which has since been named the 'cunning of nature' (due to its similarities with Hegel's 'cunning of reason') is defined. The cunning of nature involves a feature of human social interaction Kant calls 'unsociable sociability', which he defines as the human being's tendency to enter into society, a tendency connected, however, with a constant resistance that continually threatens to break up this society. Put simply it is a part of the human being's natural inclination to connect with other people and to be part of a larger whole, yet it is also a part of this same natural inclination to destroy these social bonds through isolation. Kant attributes a lot to this concept in that it is the source of all human conflict, even attributing global conflict between states as emanating from unsociable sociability. Countries enter into antagonism with each other through the mechanism of unsociable behaviour, breaking the sociable links that might have been resulting in a state of war. We need

only look at the Cold War for a striking example of unsociable sociability propelling states into unresolvable, war fuelled deadlocks.

Kant also attributes historical progression to this concept, which means that it is responsible for the human species developing toward more enlightened states. Without the antagonistic feature of the human being Kant thinks we wouldn't be propelled to grow culturally or intellectually. In this sense, unsociable sociability is the driving force behind the movement of all human history and conflict plays a major role here according to Kant. If there is a stubborn question surrounding this idea, if it doesn't seem to add up, it is perfectly understandable and in line with much post-1945 historiographic thought about progress. For how can we say that conflict in all of the ways outlined above ultimately contributes to historical progression, especially in light of the tragic horrors of the Twentieth century? Surely, we cannot judge these conflicts based on a concept of progress devised in 1784?

Actually, Kant's concept can account for these conflicts. The point toward which human history tends, according to Kant's Fifth Proposition, is a 'perfectly just civil constitution', which means an egalitarian society or a 'cosmopolitan' society whereby all are welcome and equal. Kant

Versailles: ended a war but did it start another?

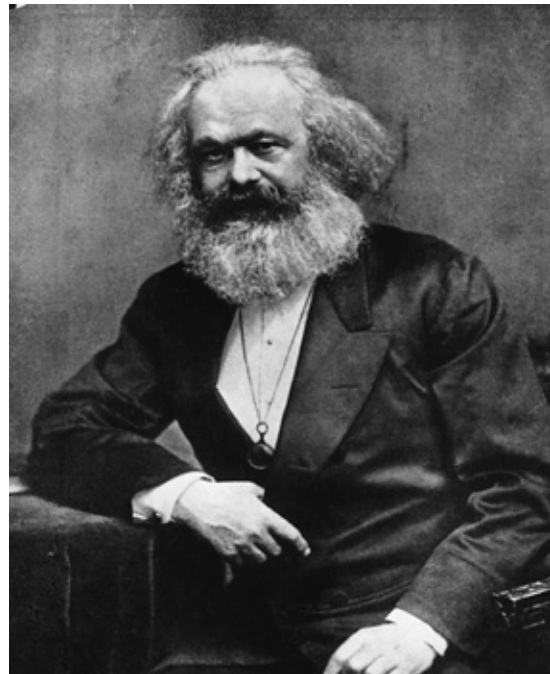
Yalta conference: did it lead to the Cold War?

responsible for the human species developing toward more enlightened states. Without the antagonistic feature of the human being Kant thinks we wouldn't be propelled to grow culturally or intellectually. In this sense, unsociable sociability is the driving force behind the movement of all human history and conflict plays a major role here according to Kant."

While it seems perfectly reasonable that humans should enter into society, and indeed as Marx put it in his early philosophical writings to fully find themselves, though they may also seek solitude for a time, it is not obvious that these opposite psychological tendencies should give rise to conflict. Nor is it justified to project the psychological needs of individuals to the level of nation states. Nation states were evolved to serve the growing needs of the emerging capitalist class, a process still immature in 1784, since, as we know, major current European nations were not formed until the late nineteenth century.

The advent of capitalism, of course, centred on a revolution in the organisation of production, with cottage industry being displaced by production in factories, but a major factor Kant doesn't seem to refer to is that of the production of material goods. This is fundamental to human existence as we know it, and is a more convincing source of conflict for nation states, since it gives rise to national competition for raw materials (e.g. currently oil) and areas of strategic influence, rather than some vague appeal to "unsocial sociability".

Thomson sees jostling for a better place on public transport as a "form of social conflict". Indeed it is! One solution to this conflict would be to enlarge the size of the bus or train. Perhaps this may seem flippant, but in a way it illustrates a vital feature of a future socialist society, that it will be based on a world of abundance of material things. And it is the replacement of the present profit-driven capitalist system by a system of socialism on a worldwide basis that socialists believe offers the only hope for humanity.



**Marx: Material needs drive history.**

In such a system, human beings will not require moral laws to guide or coerce them as to how to behave, since the source of most human conflicts will have been eliminated. A socialist society should not be regarded as 'utopian' nor will it be egalitarian. Rather it will operate according to the slogan popularised by Marx in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need."

Finally, I would query the notion that we 'learn from the mistakes made from human history'. While some parts of the globe may have enjoyed relative peace in recent decades (in Europe for example), nevertheless there have been numerous armed conflicts elsewhere during that time, and the situation has not improved since the cessation of the Cold War that Thomson refers to. Nor should we sit back and wait for a 'just society' to emerge out of the chaos of repeated conflicts. No! It is necessary for the majority of people to identify the capitalist system as the true source of world conflict, and democratically decide to abolish it.

In short, I feel that Kant, as interpreted by Thomson, has strung together a series of assertions which fail to reveal the true underlying cause of national conflicts, and therefore does not offer an adequate means for resolving them.

As a footnote, it would be interesting to learn what prompted Kant to draft his article, just a few years prior to the French Revolution.

## Reflections on Walter Benjamin's writing

# Facing Modernity

**Benjamin has written extensively on the moment of change from medieval to modern times, as well the recent change to modernity that took the world by a storm towards the end of the nineteenth century. In books and essays, such as *One Way Street*, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* and *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin traces the disappearing of the old world and the emerging of the new. The article below looks at some aspect of Benjamin's project:**

DAVID CLOUGH

**I**s George Steiner really supporting God in Real Presences? Why did he also kill tragedy (See his book: *The Death of Tragedy*)? Why has tragedy actually almost disappeared now fifty years later, when planes crash, people die or bad things no longer just happen and some human has to be negligent somewhere?

Antiquity gone, cultural memory is in the present. Gelley (writing about Benjamin's project of the Arcades in his *Benjamin's Passages*) chose to see the Flaneur through Silvia Agacinski and the Deleuzian nomad. In her 2003 *Time Passing*, Agacinski describes Walter Benjamin's world as a transient process of passing, like the fading of colour in a photograph. He also mentions how he fused Simmel's rather impressionistic sociology with Kraucauer's study of surfaces to produce his own neurotic defensive posturing about the poet or Flaneur in the modern city. Benjamin tries to preserve features of the old world as it disappears into the new by collecting items of the old, as well as pointing out the new aspects that are showing in the new world. He wanted to form a memory of the old as well as heralding the new. Before Bakhtin, Lukacs's *Theory of the Novel* told us how the Homeric epic had totality but the modernist who attempts this feels homeless. But instead

of the Hegelian totality of Lukacs, Benjamin privileges instead our experience rather as Kierkegaard or Kafka did. Kafka was his source for forgetting in particular. In experience and poverty, the familiar topics of post-World War I disorientation comes up as Benjamin leads us to his thoughts on the modern storyteller. What kind of wisdom can the modern storyteller give in our speeded up Virilio (the French cultural theorist) like fading world.

Gerhard Richter said that *Berlin Childhood* morphs into *Berlin Chronicle*, *Moscow Diary* etc. The *Berlin Chronicle* runs parallel to the



Walter Benjamin



enigmatic *One-Way Street* and *On Hashish*. A literary montage. Weimar aphorisms. *The Moscow Diary* is laconic, and more quotidian. The *Chronicle* like my London Flaneur is more about the cellular relation of neighbouring districts in the big city. How, for example, Grosvenor relates to Soho and how Kensington meets Holland Park? Kittler points out the lack of clarity in Benjamin's writings as to where subjective consciousness ends and technical representation takes over.

Kittler separates human from communicative technology much more strongly. We use communicative technology but are more exterior to it. Latour's agents are too much part of the system. They have too much agency for Kittler it seems. I have this image of myself as Flaneur, as still subjective.

For Gerhard Richter who brings in Kittler, in *Berlin Childhood* it is the *fin de siècle* recollections. It's the new world of gramophones, photos and films. Kittler sees a rupture between the degree of self-identity necessary for continuity (which Kittler will call Eighteenth Century Bourgeois Idealism) and the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, in which writing becomes mechanized. Typewriters and typists are created. This, he thinks, reduces the dreams of romantic wanders or even the straightforward traces of comportment or bodily movements. Script is objectified.

Then in *In Words of Light* Eduardo Cadava demonstrates that Walter Benjamin articulates his conception of history through the language of photography. Focusing on Benjamin's discussions of the flashes and images of history, he argues that the questions raised by this link between photography and history touch on issues that belong to the entire trajectory of his writings: the historical and political consequences of technology, the relation between reproduction and mimesis, images and history, remembering and forgetting, allegory and mourning, and visual



Steinlen: Le-Flaneur-Parisien

and linguistic representation. But then in what Cadava calls 'snapshots in prose', the book memorializes Benjamin's own thetic method of writing. It enacts a mode of conceiving history that is neither linear nor successive, but rather discontinuous – constructed from what Benjamin calls 'dialectical images'. In this way, it suggests the essential rapport between the fragmentary form of Benjamin's writing and his effort to write a history of modernity. In a way, he was looking back to the writings of the German Romantics who wrote short essays, ideas and fragments, a way of writing that survived in the writings of Nietzsche, but he was also trying to connect with the new by connecting himself to newspapers, broadcasting, translation and some sociological research. Even when he wrote his two theses for his doctorate, you sense there is a feeling of unfinished business about them, possibly because he was forced by the formal requirements of academia to work along lines which he detested (references, footnotes, authorities and elaboration beyond what he thought was necessary). You can still have brilliant ideas though they don't add up to a system, but speak of their time and place. He was writing in a time that was moving fast, culturally, technologically and politically. He became a tragic victim of such a change.

## Notes on the Wednesday Meeting 25th of October 2017

**D**avid Burridge read two of his poem to the group. A question was asked at the meeting: ‘what is the modern imaginary?’ The answer presented was that we should look at modern art, architecture and poetry. The Romantics were felt to be still important.

The ‘modern imaginary’ is clearly heavily involved with science. Science fiction films ousted cowboy films some time ago! One strong sci-fi theme is aliens invading, showing our existential fear of the ‘other’ perhaps taken to an extreme!

The symbol/allegory split was discussed. Allegories such as Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* and Dante’s *Inferno* seem to be troubling to the modern mind, while symbols are more basic and immediate.

Another question is: how does the modern fit with the post-modern? Maybe the post-modern means you can just believe what you like, it is all about the viewer, there are few constraints. In terms of music you might think that composers such as John Cage and Philip Glass in the 1960s had moved beyond classical music, but this does not seem to be the case. Was post-modernism a dead-end? Modern music seems to be moving into a ‘performative’ era, along with poetry. The heroes now are rock musicians and it is much more likely that poetry will be read out loud at an event.

Oxford’s new modern shopping arcade, Westgate, was discussed in terms of relating it to Benjamin’s *Arcade Project*. Fred Cousins showed us a picture of a very classical looking shopping arcade in Nantes. Paul mentioned Burlington Arcade next to the Royal Academy in London which is similarly ornate, exuding

a luxurious and somewhat unreal atmosphere! Shopping malls are usually much more ‘downbeat’ nowadays and can now be dangerous places!

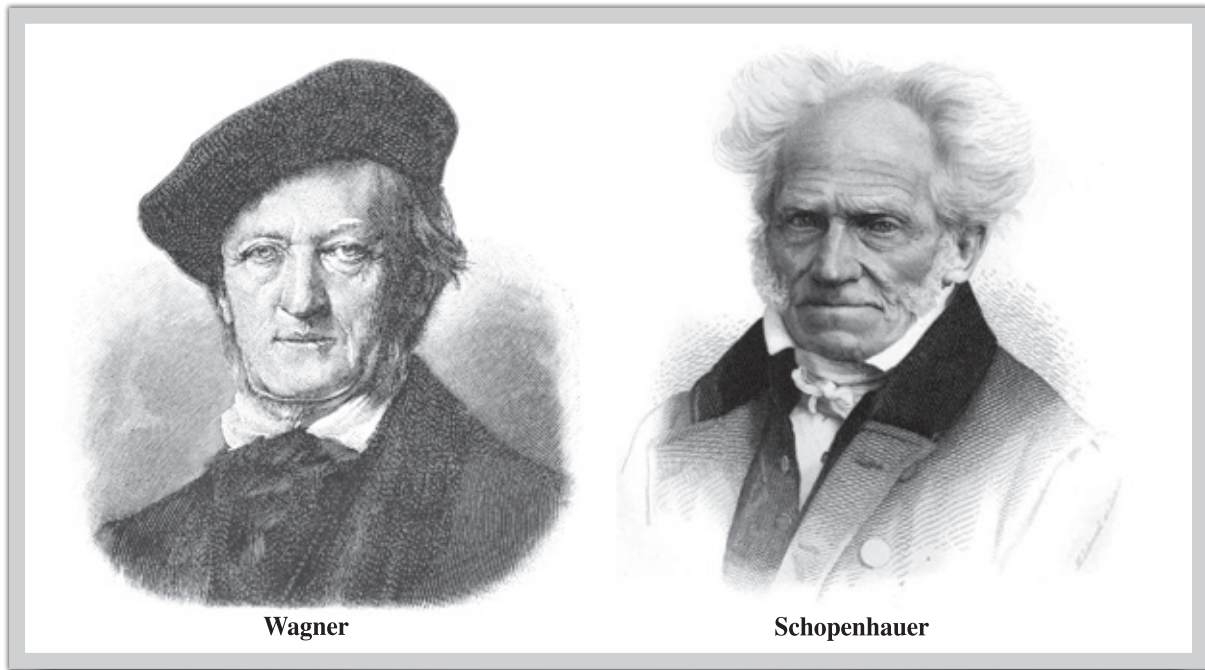
Kant’s philosophy was discussed in terms of moderation, but a question was asked if it was a clever move on his part to speak of ‘the thing in itself’ which we could not know? This led to many post-Kantians filling in this gap in our knowledge, leaving a confused picture.

Discussing Kant brought into the meeting the philosophy of Schopenhauer and its effect on the music of Wagner. I give below a summary of the weekend I attended at Rewley House, Oxford last month on these two figures, through their relationship to pessimism.

### Wagner and Philosophy

Wagner’s attitude to life was negative. He followed the philosopher Schopenhauer in this respect. Life was full of misery and suffering. This negative attitude in a strange way underpinned his revolutionary optimism: in 1849 he participated in the riots at Dresden, hoping for a brighter future. He was a passionate socialist–anarchist. The failure of the 1848 revolutions was a factor in Wagner’s negativism but why did he follow Schopenhauer’s pessimistic views?

Schopenhauer is a transcendental idealist following Kant’s ideas, and he thinks that the ‘thing in itself’, which Kant defined as something we cannot know, is the will. If we look inside ourselves so to speak, our life is a series of actions based on choosing to do what we want or think is right. But we experience stress and conflict, and we need to escape the tyranny of the will. Art disengages the will and takes away the stress of willing. Music in particular takes us to the heart of



things, it represents the will. It could be that the morality of compassion transcends our own self-will, and that in religion the ascetic impulse, self-sacrifice and resignation in the face of suffering, is helpful.

Schopenhauer believes that to get away from the tyranny of the will we need to escape the will into a mystical and more pleasant world. But this is inconsistent as the world is, according to Schopenhauer, willing. Why do we need to escape it? Renunciation of the will is perhaps good! Isolde, in Wagner's opera, seems to will herself to death, into a sea of infinitude, full of flowers.

Nietzsche thinks we must affirm the will and life, despite the suffering, unlike Schopenhauer. Nietzsche viewed the last opera Wagner wrote, *Parsifal*, as too influenced by Christian ideas. He thought the opera was too ascetic, denying the will, rather than being affirmative of the will. He wrote '*The Case against Wagner*', a polemical criticism of Wagner.

*The Ring* cycle is very violent, and Wotan has to let his own son be killed by Hunding. Fricka his wife wants justice and Wotan obeys. But he then gratuitously kills Hunding because that is simply what he wants to do, to avenge his son, but this is not a lawful act. It releases the Valkyries, as there is a Power – Law – Violence axis: when there is no law this leads

to irrational violence.

Wagner wrote the whole libretto before he wrote the music, but he said the meaning was in the music, not the words. In music the composer 'fills the space' and avoids the end, the resolution of the piece. There is an irrational status which keeps the music moving: the rational move is to resolve it, end the piece perhaps.

The physical score of a musical work, all the musical parts written down in musical notation, could be considered to be the actual material language of the music, in the same way that a book with pages is the material basis for a story which uses words. Reading the book aloud and the actual performance of the work of music could then be considered to be similar.

There is a problem with classical music in that for a particular work it is endlessly repeated. There is no development, no change in the piece. John Deathridge, one of the speakers, disputed this, saying that there have been a number of occasions when composers conducting their own work will change it, and not follow the score. However, this is not the same as jazz, which seems much more highly creative and 'of the moment', as each performance of a piece can essentially be a new piece.

**Paul Cockburn**

# Problems of Philosophy

Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind. These passions, like great winds, have blown me hither and thither, in a wayward course, over a deep ocean of anguish, reaching to the very verge of despair.

*The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*

I resolved from the beginning of my quest that I would not be misled by sentiment and desire into beliefs for which there was no good evidence.

*Bertrand Russell, Fact and Fiction*

## CHRIS NORRIS\*



**Chris Norris** is a Distinguished Research Professor in Philosophy at Cardiff University. His new poetry collection *The Winnowing Fan* was published last month by Bloomsbury, London.

No impulse undeformed by intellect.  
The pity is that pity's without end.  
How cure my old thought-feeling disconnect?

The aesthetes say: 'just feel, just introspect,  
Don't reach for some grand theory to defend'.  
No impulse undeformed by intellect.

The thinkers say: 'trust reason to correct  
Those sentiments that Bloomsbury-ward might tend'.  
How cure my old thought-feeling disconnect?

No doubt it's needs of mine that I project  
Along with each new doctrine I commend:  
No impulse undeformed by intellect.

Yet this I know: if pity runs unchecked  
It yields no wise or healing dividend.  
How cure my old thought-feeling disconnect?



Time was when they were coupled up direct,  
Says Eliot, till something spiked the blend:  
No impulse undeformed by intellect.

The fault's one any watcher might detect  
Who saw how I betrayed them, friend with friend.  
How cure my old thought-feeling disconnect?

Can't really blame it on the Bloomsbury sect  
Although their class act helped to set the trend.  
No impulse undeformed by intellect.

Too many, those relationships I wrecked;  
No better light, no saving grace to lend.  
How cure my old thought-feeling disconnect?

Moore made things simpler, as you might expect.  
'Beauty and love: on these our lives depend.'  
No impulse undeformed by intellect.

'Let those ideals your every thought inflect',  
Moore said, 'and their high truth you'll comprehend.'  
How cure my old thought-feeling disconnect?

God knows the aim's not one that I'd reject,  
Though suiting those with leisure-time to spend.  
No impulse undeformed by intellect.

For my type, the best hope's to decathect  
By further thought those thoughts we can't transcend.  
How cure my old thought-feeling disconnect?  
No impulse undeformed by intellect.



Bertrand Russell



## Poem

# A Child at Partition

ERICA WARBURTON \*

Too young for Mughal distances,  
too small for high viewpoints,  
too far below cupolas, minarets, towers,  
all I know is the diabolical gossip  
of cursing mosquitoes, spitting snakes  
and thirsty black ants in the latrine.

Macaques stake me out in the heat.  
Devilled eyes. Crazed lips. Barred teeth.  
Bunched to the muscled knuckles  
they lean, rattling the tremble in me.  
Mad dogs thicken the dark. They howl  
and slaver, marauding my dreams.

*Jai Hind, Zindhbagh! Jai Hind!*  
Legion placards, fists, sticks,  
crowd the sky. I halt. Blocked.  
Caught. Baulked by the bristle  
of black and white evidence.

Nothing seems to deflect this rasp,  
this drone, this thresh and ply  
of despair. This earth never quits  
moistening her lips in the blood  
of nations being born.  
Even the gods are appalled.  
They have left.  
These haloes are heat.

An echo of the time of Partition for an Anglo-Indian child.

*(Jai Hind, Zindhbagh: a rallying cry associated with the Indian National Anthem)*

**\*Erica Warburton is a retired mathematician, philosopher and artist.**



# Evensong.. The Word Recalls

EDMUND BURKE \*

Evensong  
The Word Recalls  
a village by the sea  
at dusk, a summer's ending,  
and from the harbourside  
a girl's voice singing  
a song  
of youth, of wistfulness  
not salted yet with tears,  
only a dawning sense  
of passing time...

a time long past,  
but still across the years,  
her song, out of the dusk  
of summer, stays with me.

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'...may God hold you in the hollow  
of his hand',

a blessing that,  
a friend says, lets her feel  
the safety of a wild bird  
in her nest,

a nest, maybe,  
that's cradled in the wind  
high up,

but welcomes  
from the dusk, the homing bird,  
and offers her respite  
from gravity,  
a place  
to fold her wings, and meet  
the nightfall, unafraid.



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\*Edmund Burke is a retired philosophy lecturer at Reading University.

## Sartre and Theology Book Launch

Kate Kirkpatrick's new book on Sartre and Theology was published recently in the series 'Philosophy and Theology'. The book had its launch last week at St. Peter's College, Oxford. A team of The Wednesday magazine attended the event and reported back on the launch:

### David Clough wrote:

Last Monday (October the 23<sup>rd</sup>) saw the launch of *Sartre and Theology*, a book by Kate Kirkpatrick at St Peter's College. I bought the book in September and I made brief comments on it then. Kirkpatrick says that Sartre has a theological background and has already influenced some theologians such as Kung and Marion. With George Pattison in the background as well as the late Pamela Sue Anderson as supervisors, it is expected that Kirkpatrick writes a few pages on Marcel but also Pope John Paul II. Spinoza was mentioned but not Schelling. It was thought that late Schelling might be relevant to some aspects of this book.

It's true that Marcel probably was more obviously Sartre's Catholic existentialist opponent but the absence of Ricoeur from the book is perhaps surprising, given his prominence at the time of writing in philosophical theology. Like Claudel and Sartre, Marcel wrote plays of course. But who is the little known Georges Bernanos who said

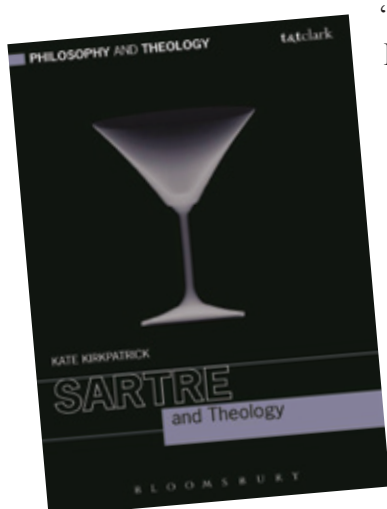
'All is grace'? George Bernanos (1888-1948) married a descendant of Joan of Arc's brother. He wrote vaguely familiar novels like the 1936 *Dairy of a Country Priest* which is not as idyllic as it sounds; not only do Pascal and Kierkegaard loom but Christianity seems

to be decaying as there's 99 percent doubt. And only one percent hope. But it's not as 'New Age' as Johanna Harris's *Chocolat*, at least not yet.

Paul Claudel remains Augustinian where our bad stuff can still be transformed into God's good. In his late works when Bergson also makes a comeback like *Recognition and Memory History Forgetting*, Ricoeur does mention some of these other figures and also in his early on book *History and Truth*. But many Catholic and neo-Kantian figures are still relatively obscure. Sartre saw atheism as a cruel long-term business. But can figures like Voltaire and Sartre really be turned into secret theists because the epoch they wrote in had a much bigger dose of theistic thinking?

Sartre's Augustinianism still includes original sin. It still has a myth of fallenness, with relatively little known French figures in the twentieth and thirteenth getting typically submerged in the story of French adaptation to Germanic ontology. One can see this in the formative years of Levinas and Ricoeur too, as well as Sartre where Nietzsche, Husserl and Heidegger tend to dominate the narration. But authors embedded in French studies often find a more French background. Augustinian thought in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries not just Pascal and Port Royal, but Descartes, Voltaire and Victor Hugo might feature and of course Rousseau whom Derrida seized on. But Rousseau like Ricoeur seems omitted here.

A comment about Tillich aroused some thought and comment. The robust Tillich said he preferred using anti-theists who weren't confused with being theologians so he turned to Sartre with some enthusiasm. But if I tended to avoid Tillich precisely







From left to right: Jonathan Webber, Kate Kirkpatrick, Katherine Morris, Johannes Zachhuber



The Wednesday's team at the book launch: David Clough (left) Mike Simera (right) photographed by Paul Cockburn

because he seemed so Sartrean, so full of negation (like Adorno in some ways), I am preferring what I thought was Ricoeur's middle way. But a young Nick Bunin preferred Marcel to the robust Tillich when he met them in the mid fifties in California where Huxley had just moved in the Big Sur.

Kirkpatrick shows some interest in mysticism and apophatic theology, mentioning Eckhart and a number of eastern orthodox figures maybe mystical, like Francois Mauriac, and even the rebel atheist, before turning to religion, J.K. Huysmans' anti-naturalist novels are full of séances and symbolist mystical elements. This is perhaps where her world and mine are connecting a little. Although Sartre thought Mauriac's characters lacked freedom he was really doing his own version in his *Transcendence of the Ego* book. But then by *Saint Genet*, Sartre's version of Flaubert is making a Pascalian wager more like Faust. Mauriac already saw religious things in Marcel's 1927 *Metaphysical Journal* which predated his official conversion by two years. The only time Sartre and Heidegger actually met they discussed one of Marcel's plays. Maybe Kojève misread Heidegger more strongly than Sartre who often went further than the publisher's commission as happened with his two books on the Imagination.

Finally, the book launch had a number of participants: Jonathan Webber came from Cardiff. He runs the British Sartre society and did a post-Kantian seminar recently. His interest was in trying to broaden the curriculum undergraduates are taught away from the standard Germanic account. Clare Carlisle thought,

perhaps surprisingly, that there wasn't so much on Kierkegaard and said that she was working on a biography of Kierkegaard. The orthodox theologian Christos Yannaras, mentioned in the book, was a new figure to me.

### ***Paul Cockburn added:***

It may be considered surprising that Sartre was influenced by theology as he was an avowed atheist! Kate Kirkpatrick's book however does show the links between Jean-Paul Sartre and theology. For instance, she shows how Sartre's early studies brought him into contact with Gabriel Marcel, who is often called a Christian existentialist. He attended Marcel's philosophy discussion class. Marcel thought there was an increasing tendency to treat others as objects rather than subjects, a prominent theme in Sartre's philosophy. Sartre said that *Being and Nothingness* was written in 'bad faith', and nothingness is Augustine's definition of sin. Sartre's philosophy was concerned with 'fallen' man. Kirkpatrick also suggests that there was also a mystical element in Sartre's atheism. There might also be a connection to late Schelling and freedom.

There is perhaps a 'middle ground' between atheism and theism. It could be a type of humanism, whereby religious concepts and the understanding of the religious nature of human beings are transferred so to speak to humanity from religion without the metaphysical 'overload' of a divine creator. It cuts the 'head' off theology. Maybe something like this occurred with Sartre, as he came under the influence of Christians such as Marcel in his early studies.

## 'All Things Are In Themselves Contradictory'

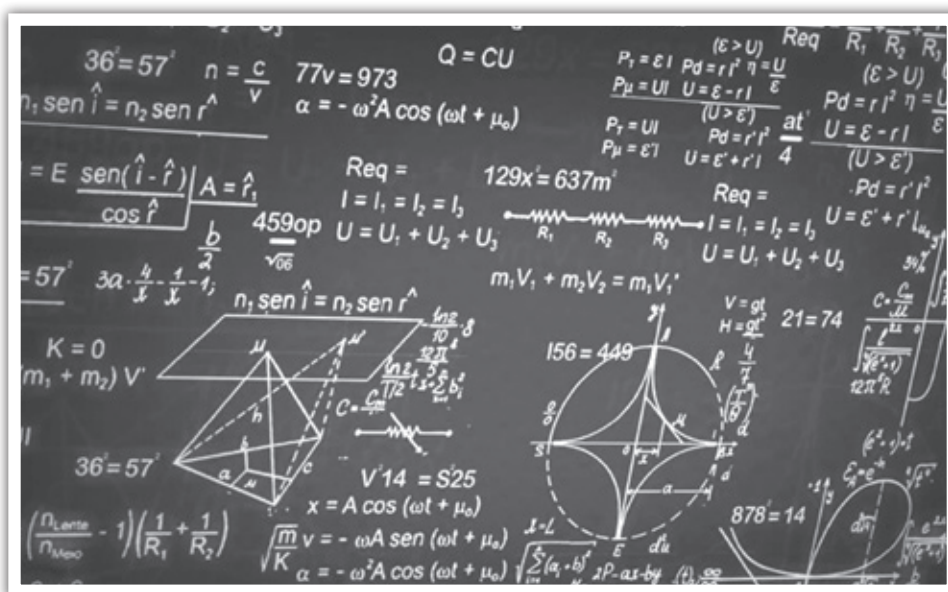
DAVID BURRIDGE

In common thought we would regard a proposition with two contradictory facts as quite simply invalid. Hegel regards contradiction as a principle, as important as the other determinations of reflection (the *shining of essence within itself*), of identity, diversity, and opposition. It is in fact more profound and more essential. Contradiction is fundamental to everything: being and nothing - finite and infinite.

He points to ordinary experience to show that contradiction is not an abnormality to be sometimes encountered. In motion: something moves because in one and the same now it is here and not here. (Rather here and now not moving in another now). The positive and negative determinations within a thing are the essential unit of that thing. He cites the contradiction to be found in trivial examples as above and under: 'Above is what under is

not; above is determined by just this, not to be under'.

The defect I referred to above as being the nature of contradiction is in his view not correct: he argues: "every determination, anything concrete, every concept, is essentially a unity of distinguished and distinguishable elements which, by virtue of the determinate, essential difference, pass over into elements which are contradictory". There is a kind of inherent sphere in a concept, with an idea resolving into its contradiction. A process of positing and sublating leads to null. He argues that if we start with a *reflective thought it will turn into a negative and visa-versa*. The *alternation* is a necessity, to understand a positive we must evaluate the negative. Two separate but essential qualities. He uses the argument of light and darkness. Darkness is more than just an absence of light: "But surely light is dimmed to grey by darkness". He sees



Mathematical Models



Hegel

this the contradictions as interactive qualities. A exists in both +A and –A.

He takes his principle to the ontological argument for the existence of God. Instead of saying that God is the sum total of all realities he argues that finite things are ‘internally fractured and bound to return to their ground’. This essential contradiction means that all that is finite will be sublated into the infinite: “the non being of the finite is the being of the absolute”.

The question is to what extent does all this make sense? Certainly the perception of a truth depends on the perception of both positive and negative. And it could be said that both must exist in a thing for it to be comprehensible – they are constituent parts of the same thing. Hegel seems to be giving contradiction a higher potency. Positive and negative are not

just points of perception but active forces of sublation and exclusion. ‘– each in its self – subsistence, sublates itself; each is simply the passing over, or rather the self-translating itself into the opposite. This internal ceaseless vanishing of the opposites is the first unity that arises by virtue of contradiction; it is the null.’

Of course, something which is finite will have its own ‘use-by-date’ and it could be said that this is a built-in negation. But that negation is just a description of the limits of the components. A light shining in the dark will displace the darkness until the power that gives the light vanishes. This is a change that occurs because of external intervention. There is in my view no omnipresent independent negative force in an ongoing dialectical struggle with positive force.

## 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.  
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