

The Wednesday



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group at Albion Beatnik - Oxford

Editorial

The Possibility of Metaphysics

Do we live in a world of actuality or one of possibilities? I will argue that we need to take ourselves as living in non-determined world, as a world full of possibilities so that we are able to live a meaningful life and be active in the world. This is not the old debate of freedom and determinism, although they are involved here, but one about value and meaning and the need to transcend the given in a process of open-ended becoming. The problem shifts now to a wider idea in which we consider the meaning of metaphysics and its proper place in human life.

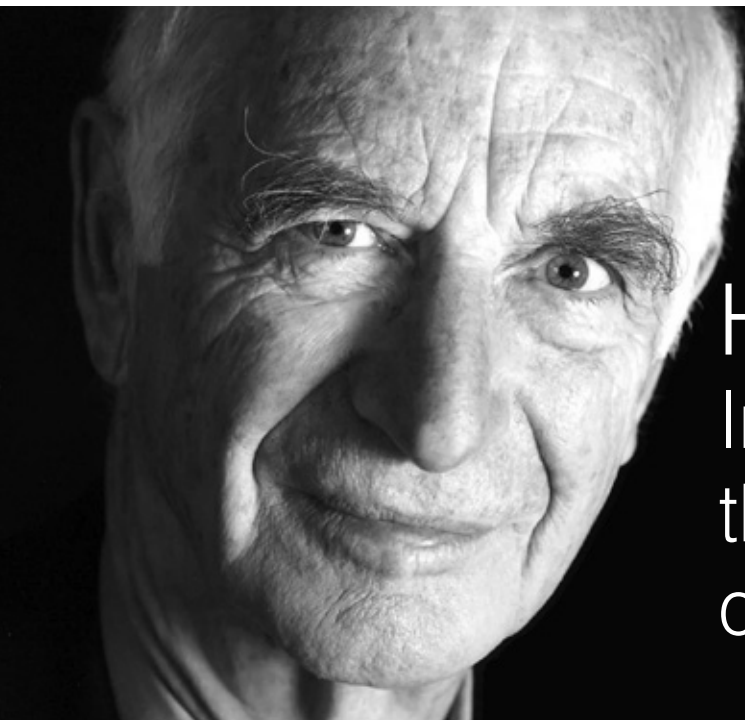
Heidegger in his famous lecture: 'What is Metaphysics?' tackles the same problem as that considered by Kant did in his *Critique of Pure Reason* but from a different direction. Kant was worried about the disparity between science and metaphysics. He complained in the *Preface* to the second edition that while science is advancing all the time, metaphysics is still groping in the dark. He was of course right. To rectify the situation, he argued for the limits of human knowledge and for dividing reality into two realms: the realm of appearances which is the subject matter of experience and science and the realm of metaphysics where we can think certain ideas, such as freedom, immortality of the soul and God but without making knowledge-claims about them. They are ideas required by reason to make sense of human life. There are indications of them in our experience but they are not open to the kind of proof used in science.

In both cases, there is a recognition that metaphysics is relevant to human life and to the very being of the human (or 'Dasein')

in Heidegger's terminology). But while Kant's argument leads to the emphasis on epistemology and the limited knowledge in the realm of appearances, Heidegger's argument went towards ontology and the questioning of the being of humans or 'Being' in general. The worry in both cases is the new scientific outlook (*Weltanschauung*) and the possibility of metaphysics.

Heidegger sees metaphysics as concerned with Dasein and Nothingness and he attempts to establish metaphysics through the concept of Nothingness. Nothing, for him, is not the opposite of being, but it belongs to being. It allows beings to have their being. Dasein transcends beings towards Nothingness and in this process reveals the Being of beings. In other words, Nothing allows the possibility of acting in the world, and acting on other beings will reveal their mode of existence or meaning. Heidegger argues that Dasein's going beyond beings is the essence of Dasein. Science on the other hand deals with Dasein in its engagement with beings and not in its relationship to Nothing. What I take Heidegger to mean is that science works with a deterministic picture of the world. It deals with causal, mechanical laws and explanations. The presence of Nothingness is a metaphysical dimension of human life and metaphysics in this interpretation is not in a different realm but the very nature of our existence. Nothing, Heidegger concludes, is a question about us and metaphysics has to be incorporated in one's life. It is a move that puts freedom not in another realm (as Kant did) but in the very fabric of the here and now.

The Editor



Hillman: Inwardness and the externalisation of the Self

James Hillman (April 12, 1926 – October 27, 2011) was an American psychologist. He studied at, and then become director of studies, at the C.G. Jung Institute in Zurich. He founded a movement to explore archetypal psychology. He was critical of the dominant approach to psychology accusing it of being reductive, materialistic, and literal. He referred to it as psychology without psyche; without soul. Hillman tried to restore psyche to psychology.

Hillman sees the soul at work in imagination, fantasy, myth and metaphor. He also sees soul revealed in psychopathology, in the symptoms of psychological disorders. For him, psyche-pathos-logos is the 'speech of the suffering soul' or the soul's suffering of meaning. A great portion of Hillman's thought attempts to attend to the speech of the soul as it is revealed via images and fantasies. But if Hillman was a psychologist of inwardness of the psychic life, he turned later on toward the external, with his involvement with public issues and political matters:

DAVID CLOUGH

2

Inspired perhaps by recent talks around Sartre from a more French perspective I recalled something said by James Hillman. Ten years ago, I looked at some early texts by James Hillman such as the 1967 *Insearch* and also *The Myth of Analysis*. But I was arguing from a Ricoeur, Hedley or Falck kind of world

then, unaware of what I have just now read about Hillman and his apparent abandonment of inwardness later in favour of external factors, whereas in Ricoeur study the issue was more about how much dialectic persists when figuration was so dominant.

Figuration is not embodiment. It is a kind of representation in the imagination, perhaps the main kind. When we talk of figurative art, we know what that means. However, art became abstract. In modernist poetry, not everything is figurative in that sense either but something else.

Yes, '*Figuration*' is a term that might look ambiguous and hard to pin down. but I don't see it as embodiment. It is quite the reverse. It is still Cartesian but that's a reading Hillman might agree with but not most modern Ricoeurians who want carnal hermeneutics where only metaphors derived from embodied experience are allowed.

But looking now, I had faced Hillman's gradual turning away from inwardness mentioned in the Guardian obituary and on wiki. This disappointed me, as it fits the exteriorisation tendency of recent times. Exactly how successful the later Hillman is as a more public political thinker perhaps remains to be seen but since he does mention Ricoeur in *Revisioning Psychology* (his prize-winning Terry Lectures published in 1975) my discussion of him brings Ricoeur in. Hillman seems to have a fully individualised situational ethics.

Hillman On Ethics Love And Suffering

There are no general answers to moral conflicts as Hillman thinks moral conflicts are individually suffered. Codes and sermonising don't touch this. Kant's categorical imperative and the Ten Commandments lack subjectivity and situationism. I suspect Ricoeur would hold that if so we are in some kind of dialectic with them, but is Ricoeur not also keen on figuration. Hillman says the moral code is the anvil and we are the hammer. In the Nietzschean sense we must in solitude hammer out our own answer. Ricoeur I thought wanted more space than this kind of opposition or dialectic. This is why his style involves detours as well as breaks or aporias when the argument seems to

get stuck.

Love is more complex than its emotions, and God is mystery not enthusiasm in Hillman's view. The differentiation of its complexities is a long initiation (cf Ricoeur again). Falling in love is only the start. We are ultimately helpless before the archetypal experience of love. But less happily a long exposure to suffering as in Paul or Job can lead to a sense of depth, a long narration etc. This was perhaps also Fredrick Nietzsche's problem but like Hillman he seems later to be uncomfortable with long narratives. Should we cut up the narrative like a tape worm or have a more continuous figurative thread. Long narrative here is more about permitting extended figuration rather than other ideas like grand narrative. Lyotard, it's true, liked the phrase 'a tape worm segment' here but I am not really focusing on Lyotard. How unbroken is the space of figuration seems more important. So, it was interesting again to compare Ricoeur here in *Freud and Philosophy*. Hillman's argument is that the dragging of ideas from id to ego in search of practical power destroys the symbolic nature and the soul along with it. If Ricoeur's narrative and Hillman's idea have enough in common it might be possible to connect Ricoeur to a similar view of the soul. (But I thought this was through aspects of figuration.) Maybe then I was trying to promote Ricoeur but have found that it seems harder when the key models are very dialectical. Those doing projects typically around thinkers like Luther, Kierkegaard, Adorno, Sartre and Tillich seem to stick with discussing Marcel but not (or rather than) his main pupil.

Hillman's View Of French Philosophy

Hillman's *Revisioning Psychology* discusses the predilections of Sartre and then discusses how the attempts of Marcel, Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur all tend to retain some of the Cartesian dilemma they were seeking



to overcome through the lived body plus language. In French thought in particular, ideation and action at least since Descartes are entirely separate or even opposed. In Sartre the opposition became also one between an elite writer above the melee and the politicised fighter or activist who descends to the street, but that is perhaps incidental here. Hillman may have a point about French Philosophy. Why does Ricoeur start with Descartes in *Fallible Man* and then in *One Self as Another* re-position the self rather crudely between the said Frenchmen and the deconstructed self of the Franco-German Nietzscheans. So, we have to ask perhaps whether or to what extent is Ricoeur actually reducing dialectics to figuration. Catherine Malabou thought he read Hegel that way in her book *The Plasticity of Hegel*, while Lacan might have implied sort of the same thing in regard to his hermeneutical Freud in his *Four Concepts* lecture. Hillman by contrast warned against the reductive tendencies of interpretation and theoretical speculation.

I may perhaps have liked the warmth of Hillman when he said things like: Where possible one should 'befriend' one's dreams. However, the meaning is not always linked to daily life or the soul in an obvious way. There is a tendency when explaining to simply replace the id with the ego through rationalisation. Instead he

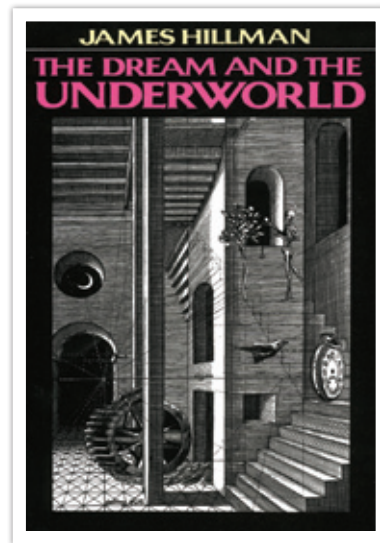
would advocate 'sticking to the image', whose often indistinct or paradoxical language spoke, he argued, with more authenticity than verbal discourse. As the web says: TV and Film was in fact an ideal vehicle for his ideas. He was the main contributor to many films *The Heart Has Reasons* (Channel 4, 1993), *Kind of Blue* (Channel 4, 1994) and the five part-series *The Architecture of the Imagination* (BBC2, 1994). He published groundbreaking works including *Re-Visioning Psychology* (1975), based on the prestigious Terry lectures he had given at Yale in 1972. This Pulitzer-nominated book was followed by *The Dream and the Underworld* (1979) and *The Myth of Analysis* (1983). In these central studies, Hillman sets out, with great erudition as well as a gift for subversion, to 'see through' the idea and practice of psychology, the way in which we extract meaning from dreams and the guiding fictions behind the practice of psychoanalysis. But then I continued to read that having practiced as an analyst for forty years, he eventually became highly critical of therapy. He argued that the sickness of humanity lay in the world rather than within each person. Therapy should therefore, he believed, somehow change politics, cities, buildings, schools and our relationship with the natural environment rather than focus solely on people's inner lives.

Early Hillman

In his early *Suicide and the Soul* and *Insearch* Hillman was talking to sixties theology. This is the same world that Alistaire Kee confronted in the *Way of Transcendence*. The prevailing question in Ricoeur is how symbol becomes metaphor to allow desire to find its voice. In Hillman, soul is a symbol not a solid part of the psyche. Yet Hillman can describe it as: that which makes meaning possible, turning events into experiences, and is communicated in love, with a religious concern (*Insearch*, P36-40, 37). He shows how primitive cultures describe a condition of loss of soul where a person loses both social inner connections and feels

unable to participate in the group. Meanwhile looking at my old copy of Hillman's *Myth of Analysis* it actually dates from 1969 not 1983 (as the web seems to believe), so it's before *Revisioning Psychology* by some distance. (Well 3 or 4 years at least). It consists of 3 *Eranos lectures* from 1966, 1968 and 1969. What father's the psyche? He initially asks in the now somewhat old fashioned sounding world of depth psychology.

When I read *Wikipedia*, there was some critique from semi familiar Jungian names like David Tacey. Hillman is imaginal rather than archetypal in the view of Jungian orthodoxy and he also rejects or ignores individuation. Hillman considers his work as an expression of the 'puer aeternus', the eternal youth of fairy tale who lives in an eternal dream-state, resistant to growing up. David Tacey maintained that the denial of the maturational impulse will only lead to it happening anyway but in a negative form. He holds that Hillman's model was 'unmade' by the missing developmental element of his thought. Marie-Louise von Franz meanwhile regarded identification with the 'puer aeternus' as itself a neurosis belonging to the narcissistic spectrum. Against this, Hillman has argued that the *puer* is not under the sway of a mother complex but that it is best seen in relation to the *senex* or father archetype. Hillman thinks that as a painter, mystic or doctor one lives within a mythic envelop as one's navigational guide. We study and try to define what these myths are. But if the new arrives some kind of interpenetration from the outside also occurs. The soul might be disorientated but ultimately also enlarged. But could soul-making not be beyond individualist notions of individuation a more collective or social polyphonic process? Not just myself but the contributions of others welcomed, rivalries overcome. (And while this did remind me a bit of the rather brutal shattering of Herman Hesse in *Steppenwolf* it wasn't perhaps the multiple personality hauntings or singular idem multiplications of the 1999 film *Being John Malkovich* either.) So, I saw Hillman then



was a kind of deconstructive version of a more regulated centred Jung. But looking him up on line recently, as is becoming clearer I got a bit of a shock. Hillman too it seems had abandoned inwardness. Where I did associate him with Robert Bly's *Iron John* or the too self-obsessed world of Personalised Mythology. Now it was just somehow political.

Public Statements/Quotes

- We carve out risk-free lives where nothing happens.
- Depression opens the door to beauty of some kind.
- We can't change anything until we get some fresh ideas, until we begin to see things differently.
- The word 'power' has such a generally negative implication in our society. What are people talking about? Are they talking about muscles, or control?
- Loss means losing what was. We want to change but we don't want to lose. Without time for loss, we don't have time for soul.
- It's very hard to know what wisdom is.
- I see happiness as a by-product. I don't think you can pursue happiness.
- I don't think anything changes until ideas change. The usual American viewpoint is to believe that something is wrong with the person.

Sestina: A Shock to the System

CHRIS NORRIS

Logic and arithmetic seem to fit together naturally. Imagine then the colossal shock felt by Gottlob Frege, who had spent years attempting to prove that arithmetic could be based on logic, when he received a letter from Bertrand Russell demonstrating that his proof was fallacious. Something momentous had happened: Frege had collided with the limits of logic.

Alastair McFarlane

I'll not pretend it didn't hit me hard.
That Russell letter wrecked my dearest work.
Truth must prevail, of course, but it did set
My project back. Who'll say they wouldn't mind
If someone proved they'd given half their life
To prop a craze-cracked edifice of thought?

Truth's all that matters; clarity of thought
And concepts standing out distinct and hard.
So, when they'd chide me 'Gottlob, get a life,
Get out a bit, get laid!', I'd get to work
On my *Begriffsschrift*, or apply my mind
To building numbers from the empty set.

That's where the problems started, as if set
To catch me out or agitate my thought
By some ingenious demon with a mind
To screw things up. Not merely make it hard
But fix it so the system wouldn't work
And those cursed paradoxes sapped its life.



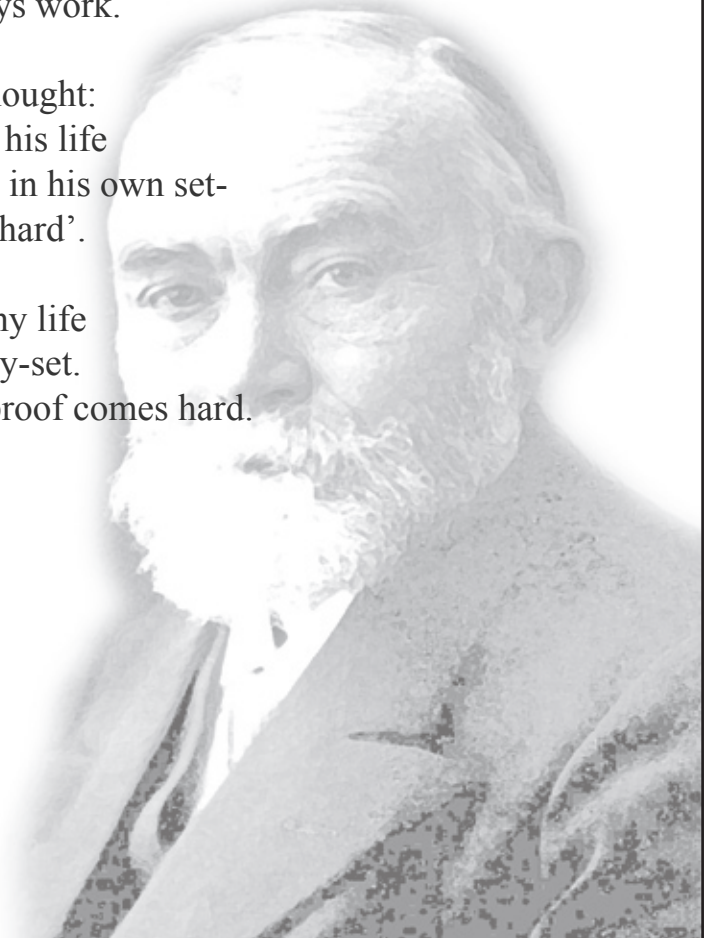
Mine too, I have to say; the kind of life
Whose sense of purpose foundered on the 'set
Of all those sets (just feel its mischief work!)
That are not members of themselves'. That thought
Did so much to unravel all my hard-
Won progress that it near unhinged my mind.

The word soon got around, but I don't mind.
It's truth alone that matters, not my life-
Upsets or grievances, however hard.
If it's objective truth that you've once set
Your sights on, then you'll give no second thought
To who first got the thought-machine to work.

Yet that fine counsel doesn't always work.
Too often some infirmity of mind
Has me indulging the unworthy thought:
'Serves Russell right if nothing in his life
Quite filled the hole he'd knocked in his own set-
Theoretic project: hope he took it hard'.

I hoped my work might validate my life
As mind built logic's empire set-by-set.
Such was my thought, and its disproof comes hard.

Gottlob Frege



Ibn Arabi and the argument for God's existence

In his book *The Gemstones of Wisdom*, the Andalusian mystic Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) argued against the ontological proof which derives God's existence from mere concept without considering the world. The following article explains why Ibn Arabi criticises this proof and shows the relevance of his argument to modern philosophy:

RAHIM HASSAN

The statement that 'God can be known without considering the world' has been suggested by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali in his proof for the existence of God. Ibn Arabi mentions it in his chapter (*Rapturous love wisdom in the word of Ibrahim*) of *Fusus al-Hikam* (The Gemstones of Wisdom) but only to criticise it and to move on to present several other arguments culminating in the one that is based on his metaphysics of the Oneness of Being and the *Immutable Entities*. I will first show why Ibn Arabi rejects such argument (or should reject it) and I will argue here that this argument, together with all other arguments presented in the chapter, are used by Ibn Arabi as a build-up to his decisive argument that is based on *Kashf* (Revelation) and on his metaphysics. It will also become clear that the whole procedure of Ibn Arabi amounts to different steps in one argument.

Ibn Arabi says:

'Some thinkers, including Abu Hamid (al-Ghazali), have claimed that God can be known without considering the world, but this is a mistake: certainly, an eternal, pre-existing essence can be known, but It is not known as a divinity until that which depends on It is known, and which is proof of it.'

What al-Ghazali said had a lasting influence in the history of philosophy. It has come to be known as the 'Ontological Argument'. Stated in a rough fashion, the argument goes like this:

'I could close my eyes (i.e. ignore the world)

and think of a most perfect being. Existence is an attribute of perfection. This being must, then, have this attribute. Therefore, the most perfect being does exist.'

The argument was then taken up by St. Anselm and Descartes. But the history of philosophy also presented many refutations of this argument; the most decisive of which are Kant's and Russell's. The refutation in both cases was based on the idea that 'Existence' is not an attribute but a 'quantifier'. (For a history of the Ontological Argument and the relevant texts, please see: John Hick: *The Existence of God*, Macmillan, New York, 1964, PP 23-70.)

Ibn Arabi, for his part, doesn't reject it as an argument for the existence of God but he sees it insufficient to provide 'knowledge' of Him. This is interesting for the following reasons:

a) The question for Ibn Arabi is not the existence, but the knowledge, of God. He doesn't seem to be worried about presenting proofs for the existence of God. Rather what he is always arguing for is how we know God and come closer to Him. The world and ourselves are proofs of the existence of God. (This is presented by Ibn Arabi in the second and third steps of his argument.) He also goes further by suggesting that the existence of God gives us certainty of our own existence. (The fourth and last step of his argument.)

b) Ibn Arabi does not question the validity of the rational proof of God. What he is questioning is the value of such proof. The Ontological Argument

gives us, assuming its validity, the knowledge that there is a God (or most perfect being) but allowing no other knowledge of Him. The God that we get from this argument is transcendent. Using Ibn Arabi's vocabulary, we could say that this is the God of *Tanzih* (or *non-comparability*); or in Ibn Arabi's words: 'an eternal, pre-existing esser cannot be known, but It is not known as a divinity. This is the God of the philosophers.'

c) The concept of a non-comparable God, Ibn Arabi's view, is not to be rejected but to be complemented by another conception. The meaning now is from the 'Essence' to 'Divinity' and this can only be achieved by considering God in His relationship with the world. It is in this relationship that one adopts a human perspective and gives God the attributes that we know God with, such as Love, Knowledge, Will, Power, etc. These attributes are human and they come to the fore every time we talk about God. Ibn Arabi says:

'[t]hese attributes are brought about by our realities, and we make Him God through establishing Him as such. He is not known until we are known.'

Hence, the God that we get in considering His relationship with the world is the God of *Tashbih* (*similarity*). This is the God of the theologians.

d) The proof above is an improvement on the first and it does also present us with a complementary concept of God. They are both valid proofs and Ibn Arabi does not reject them in this chapter. However, he doesn't find them satisfying. I have suggested in (b) why he wasn't satisfied with the first proof and I will venture some reasons why wasn't he satisfied with the second proof:

First: Ibn Arabi sees God not as the cause of the world but thinks of the world as a self-disclosure of God. The world is not some sort of event that has happened in space and time which has to be explained by the law of causality (as in the Cosmological Argument: Every event needs a cause. Or in the Design (Teleological) Argument: the world has been rationally arranged, therefore there is a reason that has created it well arranged.) The worry here is that one might take the world



Ibn Arabi

to be independent of God. One might think that in knowing the world and knowing God that we come to know two facts.

Secondly: The arguments from the world to God are based on induction and Ibn Arabi has argued in his *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyah* (*The Meccan Opening*, vol. 1, P284 of the Sadr edition) that induction is not a good guide in matters of Faith.

Thirdly: Ibn Arabi sees such arguments (as the cosmological and design arguments) are put in a reverse order. It is not God's existence that is dependent on us but it is the other way around: our existence depends on God. For this reason, Ibn Arabi says:

'[...] that the Real Himself is the same as the proof of Himself and of His divinity, and that the world is nothing but His self-revelation in the forms of the immutable essences, whose existence is impossible without that [self-revelation].'



This is the God of *Kashf* (Mystical revelation).

e) With the God of *Kashf* we come to a real knowledge of God and Ibn Arabi elaborates this point by making a further step in his argument. Ibn Arabi reverses the philosopher's arguments by making the knowledge of ourselves dependent on the knowledge of God. It is through the grace of God that we come to such knowledge. Ibn Arabi says:

'[...] another unveiling is given where He shows you our forms within Him, so that some of us appear to one another in the Real, some cognising each other and some distinguishing ourselves from each other.'

It is interesting to compare the whole argument with Descartes' *Meditations*, particularly the fifth Meditation. Descartes says, in a way of conclusion:

'Thus, I see plainly that the certainty and truth of all knowledge depends uniquely on my awareness of the truth of God, to such an extent that I was incapable of perfect knowledge about anything else until I became aware of Him.' (Descartes: *Meditations on First Philosophy*, ed. John Cottingham, Cambridge, 1996, P 49).

One could see in the steps of Ibn Arabi's argument, structured in the way pointed out above, that he is referring to the God of the philosophers and the theologians and shows that they are not sufficient to give us a true knowledge of God. Yes, the God of *similarity* complement the God of *incomparability*

but one needs to go beyond both conceptions to gain a close (or intimate) knowledge of God. Given the title of the chapter and the attribute of Prophet Ibrahim as *al-Khalil* (Friend of God), one could see the relevance of this argument to the chapter and the kind of knowledge Ibn Arabi is alluding to. Knowledge of God comes from being a friend of God not by rational proofs. It comes as grace from God for those who are on the Sufi path.

Just before I finish this article, I refer here to Kant who considered the ontological, cosmological and design proofs of the existence of God and he rejected them all. This didn't make him a disbeliever. On the contrary, he wrote his *Critique of Pure Reason* to make a room for faith in a sceptical age. Kant's proof of God is based on moral consideration and that God is a transcendental postulate (or Idea) of reason. The difference with Ibn Arabi is that Kant assumes the existence of God but denies any 'knowledge' of Him: you can think God but you can't claim knowledge of Him. (See: *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. Norman Kemp Smith, Macmillan, 1929, PP495-524) Ibn Arabi on the other hand is full of the knowledge of God, but his knowledge is based on mystical experience, but he was also fully aware of the philosophical proofs and their shortcomings.

(All translations of Ibn Arabi in this article are taken from the unpublished translation of *The Gemstones of Wisdom* by Stephen Hirtenstein. My thanks and gratitude to him for introducing me to Ibn Arabi's writings and for being my teacher and friend for nearly a decade.)

Philosophical Reflections

DAVID BURRIDGE

A Thought Comes When It Wishes

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Part 1, para 17, Nietzsche says:

‘...a thought comes when “it” wishes, and not when “I” wish, so that it is a falsification of the facts of the case to say that the subject “I” is the condition of the predicate “think”.’

Whilst he accepts that a thought requires an agent, he prefers thoughts that have no promulgator. Maybe the wind or some mystic force shoves them into our heads. Perhaps to say this helps him push beyond the framework of good and evil. But Nietzsche is wrong! We create thoughts. We may be influenced by social factors; the legacy of our upbringing or the need to conform to group pressures, but at the end of the process, we create the thoughts in our heads and we must take responsibility for them.

Even if we question the Cartesian ego and reject his fundamental proposition that God has created an orderly Universe, we still need to make a start with the “I”. It may be said that it is a construction which has no sense in philosophy. If this were the case we should all immediately stop philosophy and concentrate on simply surviving like any other species of animal. Of course, we should be sceptical and question things to enable the “I” to improve his understanding of the truth.

Morality defines our relationship with our fellow humans. We may have the need sometimes to revise what we mean by good and evil, but there is still a need to work within a moral framework, otherwise we destroy each other and ultimately the human race.



Nietzsche

Empirical Proof

I was exercising on the running machine in the gym. My normal heart rate under these circumstances is 85-90 beats per minute (bpm). I stepped onto the machine and the sensor confirmed that my bpm was normal. During the exercise period I began thinking about Nietzsche and became very quietly angry. So much so that when I touched the sensors my heart rate had increased to 120 bpm. I thought then if Nietzsche was right and thoughts were not the product of my ego then I was helpless and at the mercy of this thought, in fact it could raise my heartbeat to such an extent that I might have a heart attack. However if I can control the thought then he was wrong. So I continued with my exercise and looked out the window, at the trees, the birds, and the little children who were being brought by their parents to their swimming lessons. I was calm, the Nietzschean thoughts had disappeared and my bpm returned to normal range throughout my workout. So, I controlled the thought process and therefore uncontrollable thoughts are a myth.

Notes on The Wednesday Meeting 15th November 2017

Paul Cockburn

The meeting started with a discussion of poetry. Some poems were read. It was thought these should be read out loud twice, and a time of silence after this was needed to aid 'absorption' of a poem.

The idea of polarities in life was discussed and then applied to poetry and thinking in general. There are many polarities in life, but life itself could be explained as free life and confining form (to use the words of S T Coleridge). Vital energy needs to be contained. The energy in a poem is a field of different forces that need to be contained in the words of the poem and its form. Some polarities are inseparable for example thought and thinking. We cannot have a thought without thinking it, but we can distinguish the two concepts; 'a thought' and 'the act of thinking'.

The imagination

The imagination is also vital for poetry and philosophy. A quote from Coleridge was considered:

'The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM'.

The 'I AM' seems to refer to God (the Biblical 'I AM THAT I AM, ultimately unknowable and unfathomable perhaps), but also the self. What can the imagination do for us? Can we 'tune in' somehow to a universal mind? Poems such as '*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*' (by Coleridge) are often mysterious, using symbols which are subtle. They are not logical or direct. Yet they resonate with people. They seem to express a truth in some way. How do poems become famous? Are they speaking transcendent truths to us from above, a higher level of consciousness perhaps, or are there social factors which mean they become embedded in our culture. Coleridge seems to be using his unconscious self and dreams in his poems. He is unusual in that he writes poems and constructs a

philosophy dealing with the imagination and the writing of his poems.

It is often forgotten that the Romantics were interested in science as well as the arts. This may be because scientists have to use their imagination to construct new theories which can be tested and proved in ingenious ways. Coleridge was interested in chemistry and performed scientific experiments with Sir Humphry Davy, and Novalis for instance was a mining engineer.

Perhaps the imagination cannot be contained. It could point to those parts of the universe we cannot yet understand, and link to a 'collective unconsciousness' as envisioned by Jung. Psychotherapy can perhaps use myths and stories and even philosophical 'therapy' (as in the books of Irvin D. Yalom) to help those suffering from psychological problems to solve them.

In the thinking of a philosopher such as Paul Ricoeur, questions are left open as he encounters aporias, problems which may have no solution. He then tends to tackle the problem from a different angle or move on to a different problem. He started by writing on phenomenology, influenced by Husserl, then wrote on hermeneutics (meaning and the hermeneutics of suspicion), then language, then psychoanalysis, and then history. He also wrote on the will, evil, ethics and narrative discourse. The psychologist James Hillman, originally a follower of Jung, also opened up lots of diverse psychological possibilities.

David Clough adds:

Ricoeur And The Hill Climbing Metaphor

The space of narration is a figurative space in which we speak. But Jaspers and post Kantian philosophy have limits. Is the Ricoeurian move to start in a different space simply escapist?

Sure, I want Ricoeur's figurative space not only to allow more speech, more explanation. Maybe it will have more understanding but also aspects

that are still Cartesian or even mystical but even he will recognize aporias where no further progress is possible.

What I contend he does in many books is simply try to ascend the hill of the 'problem' from a different place as though he was addressing someone in a therapeutic situation. This does not sound spectacular or original but is relatively

unusual in philosophy, hence the fuss about Ricoeur's 'detours' being unusual. But none of this guarantees a climb all the way to the top of the theoretical hill. All one might get is a more rounded attempt closer to a 360-degree view of its problems which is often what happens. Some readers then find Ricoeur a bit frustrating, even pointless if they think another approach avoids or solves the problems he raises.

Coleridge on Poets and nature

A great Poet must be, *implicit* if not *explicite*, a profound Metaphysician. He may not have it in logical coherence, in his Brain & Tongue; but he must have it by *Tact*: for all sounds, & forms of human nature he must have the *ear* of a wild Arab listening in the silent Desert, the *eye* of a North American Indian tracing the footsteps of an Enemy upon the Leaves that strew the Forest; the *touch* of a Blind Man feeling the face of a darling Child.

Letters, 13 July 1802

The Poet is not only the man who is made to solve the riddle of the Universe, but he is also the man who feels where it is not solved and which continually awakens his feelings... What is old and worn out, not in itself, but from the dimness of the intellectual eye brought on by worldly passions, he makes new: he pours upon it the dew that glistens, and blows round us the breeze which cooled us in childhood.

Lecture on Poetry, 12 December 1811

Back to Nature

Richard Holmes in his book: '*Coleridge: Darker Reflections*' (P.494) says that Coleridge was exhausted after giving a course of lectures on the history of philosophy between 14th of December 1818 and 29th of March 1819. He went back to nature and his old vision of the divine in Nature. Coleridge then wrote the following poem '*To Nature*':

'It may indeed be fantasy, when I
Essay to draw from all created things
Deep, heartfelt, inward joy that closely clings;
And trace in leaves and flowers that round me lie
Lessons of love and earnest piety.
So let it be; and if the wide world rings
In mock of this belief, it brings
Not fear, nor grief, nor vain perplexity.
So will I build my altar in the fields,
And the blue sky my fretted dome shall be,
And the sweet fragrance that the wild flower yields
shall be the incense I will yield to Thee,
Thee only God! and thou shalt not despise
Even me, the priest of this poor sacrifice.'



Coleridge

Events

A Philosophical Wonderland in Gerrards Cross

BRIAN WALDY

A cursory glance at the well regarded *Annotated Alice* (by Martin Gardner, 1960) would suggest that there is more to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and the later *Through the Looking Glass* than might at first appear. For the thirty or so attendees at the *Alice in Wonderland* Philosophy Festival, held in Gerrards Cross last September, there was an eye-opening exposition of some of the ideas that Lewis Carroll (in reality the Revd. C. L. Dodgson, Oxford don) had managed to slip

into these two, ostensibly children's, books, published in 1865 and 1871.

The aim of this event, the first in what is hoped to be an annual philosophy festival, was to provide mental stimulation and food for philosophical discourse both for amateur and academic philosophers regardless of their stage on the road to enlightenment. Or at least that is how it appeared to this reporter who is very much at the start of his journey.



Participants in the festival

Alice, or rather Lewis Carroll, was the thread that connected the six speakers and the conference celebrated the fecundity of Carroll's ideas, which as Bob Clarke showed, was a product of the lively debates and controversies of mid-Victorian Britain. This meant that the day encompassed discussions on what words meant (Jenni Jenkins), how apparently impossible concepts from *Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* can have meaning in the real world (Peggy Verrall), how we ought to be careful to distinguish belief from trust (Rob Wheeler) and whether sense can be found in nonsense (Fauzia Rahman).

The fact that Carroll, a mathematician by discipline, was obviously greatly interested in other subjects, no doubt debated at High Table by some of the great minds of the age, was echoed by the fact that so many of the speakers had themselves studied other subjects in addition to philosophy, including theology, medicine, physics and yes mathematics. In the case of Bernhard Kelley-Patterson he is also a working psychiatrist who gave a Lacanian view of reality through the looking glass.

A true conference, I think, comprises not only the given papers, with question and answer sessions afterwards, but also the

discussions in small groups at the coffee and tea breaks and at lunch. While one can only be in one place at one time - in the real world at least - it appeared that discussions taking place elsewhere were just as lively as those in which this reporter participated.

As proof that the Alice books continue to provide fruitful ground for exploration, Bob Clarke mentioned and recommended the book *Alice in Space* by Gillian Beer, published just last year.

One of the results of having attended the festival is that not only are the various papers and the discussions still buzzing around in my head, but that I am fired up to revisit the two original Alice books and *The Annotated Alice*, as well as diving into *Alice in Space*.

To adapt a well-known legal bon mot, after this philosophical festival I may be none the wiser, but I am certainly better informed and have been both stimulated and entertained.

Thankfully though, at the end of the conference I wasn't quite in the situation Alice finds herself towards the end of *Through the Looking Glass*, when the Red Queen says 'Fan her head! She'll be feverish after so much thinking'!

The Wednesday

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The Wednesday

Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group at Albion Beatnik - Oxford

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