

The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group at Albion Beatnik - Oxford

Editorial

The Philosopher as a Reformer

It may come as a surprise to many that Nietzsche was and could be considered a Reformer, but that is how he thought of his philosophy. He was four years old when revolution erupted throughout Europe, especially in Germany and France. His future mentor, the musician Richard Wagner, took part in the Dresden revolution of 1848, and suffered exile when it failed. Incidentally, a similar fate befell Marx. Wagner was radical at the time and on the side of the left-Hegelians and was influenced by the thought of Feuerbach. But despite the turn in his thought, it is Wagner the reformer that Nietzsche recognised in him when they met nearly twenty years later.

Nietzsche's idea of reform is the power of myth and music. He thought that the Greeks had both in the age of their strength. He thought that Europe has fallen into decadence and nihilism and could only be saved with a new mythology and Wagner's music. Nietzsche wrote to his former fellow student in Bonn and Leipzig, Erwin Rohde, at the end of 1870:

'Even if we do not find many people to share our views, I still believe that we can fairly – not without losses, of course – pull ourselves up out of this stream, and that we shall reach an island on which we shall not need to stop our ears with wax any more. Then we shall be teachers to one another; our books will be merely hooks for catching people into our monastic and artistic community. We shall love, work, enjoy for one another – perhaps this is the only way in which we can work for the whole.'

Six years later, Nietzsche fell out with Wagner and formed another alliance with Lou Salomé and Paul Ree. However, this was a sentimental and private affair rather than communal and public. This project

also failed but resulted in a few disputed fruits and an acrimonious 'divorce.' Lou Salomé, in a book published after the mental collapse of Nietzsche, claimed that Nietzsche took his ideas from Ree. Cosima Wagner claimed that Ree and Salomé were behind the rift between Wagner and Nietzsche and that they had diverted the attention of Nietzsche from his Wagnerian period. Nietzsche's sister wrote a book to counter Salomé's claim and Nietzsche rejected such accusation in his lifetime (see section 2 of the *Preface of Genealogy of Morals*.) However, Nietzsche went his own way and created the community he dreamed of on paper. He called them: *Free Spirits* and *Good Europeans*.

But by the time he was bordering on mental collapse, he felt that he was alone on a long road of suffering. This didn't discourage him, for he identified himself with Dionysus, the god of excess and intoxication. He wrote of himself at the end of *Ecce Homo*, his intellectual biography: Dionysus versus the Crucified. It was a far cry from his heyday when he dreamt of a community of like-minded and the reform of Europe. Was the dream defeated then? On the face of it, the answer is 'yes', but on a better evaluation 'no'. Nietzsche identified himself with his favourite mythical god, Dionysus, the god of tragic wisdom and affirmation. More relevant is that Nietzsche, by the time of his mental collapse, thought he has just arrived at his major discovery of the nature of European nihilism, pessimism and decadence and that he was going to set out on the project of '*Re-Evaluating of all Values*' but he ran out of time. We are lucky to have notes and outlines of such a Re-Evaluation and they still exert their power on the perceptive reader. It may need another philosopher with a vision of reform and a clear mind to see through decadence, nihilism and the sense of defeat.

The Editor



From Philosophy to Psychology: **Fichte's Influence on 20th Century Philosophy and Thought**

Fichte was one of the brilliant philosopher who succeeded Kant. Their lives overlapped and they were surrounded by many great figures in German philosophy and literature. Fichte developed the subjective side of Kant's philosophy and opened the way for more rigorous investigation of the ground of the self that became the real topic of psychology. The following article gives an outline of Fichte's philosophy and its influence on philosophy and psychology in the twentieth century, particularly phenomenology, existentialism and psychoanalysis and the unconscious:

DAVID SOLOMON

2

German Idealism as developed not only by Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762 – 1814) but his contemporaries such as F W J Schelling (1775-1854), and Novalis (1772 – 1801) among others, came out of the radical new approach to philosophy put forward by Emmanuel Kant (1734 – 1804). His Transcendental Idealism was an exploration of the possibility of understanding the world

as it presented itself to our normal state of consciousness, in terms of our own rationality reaching out towards it. For Kant, external objects are not immediately available to us and then taken in in the form of an internal impressions or copies. We could not have intuitions of things in the world unless we had a pre-existing ('a priori') awareness of forms of consciousness such as space and time, and

categories of understanding, into which we fit the sense impressions we receive in order to make them meaningful. We are not merely passive recipients of external reality, but our understanding depends on our applying actively our own rational forms to the appearances around us. This applies in different ways also to our sense of ourselves as subjects, and our ethical values (although these cannot be taken from the world at all but entirely depend in our rationality as we conceive it).

The shift to a subjective rationality was taken up by Kant's Idealist successors who were conscious of their predecessor's failure to map out a unified system to account for the different kinds of reality we live: of nature as determined necessity, but at the same time of ourselves as free to make ethical choices and to act on them.

Kant's philosophical approach emphasised activity rather than passivity in the subject, and this was taken up and radicalised by Fichte. The latter used simple thought experiments that his students and readers could use to establish the possibility of an Intellectual Intuition (i.e. non-sensory intuition) of a primary rational Act of the I (what he called the I positing itself or $I = I$) from which we could get our experience of external material reality as apparently existing independently of our own efforts on the one hand (the Not-I), our subjective sense of self on the other but also most importantly our sense of freedom to act in the world. Fichte made a number of attempts to distinguish these different modes of being and relate them to the original act of the I positing itself. What I would like to do in this article is to show the way in which his efforts anticipated the concerns of 20th philosophy and thought especially theorists of Phenomenology, Existentialism and Psychoanalysis who were influenced by him directly or indirectly and so were a source of

themes that they could develop along their own lines.

As I pointed out in a previous article (*The Wednesday*, Issue 16, November the 8th, 2017), the original foundational act of the I, preceding the distinction we make between our sense of necessary objective reality and our experience of ourselves as subject, is an act in which subject and object are entwined together. The idea of *Entwinement* in Fichte parallels those of the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908 – 1961) of the *Entwinement of Chiasm*. In Merleau-Ponty, *Chiasm* refers to an inverse relationship between two elements within a system or complex, a relationship which is capable of reversal. We can illustrate this through a simple practical experiment: If my left hand grasps my right hand, the former feels the latter as an object, the former we can call Sentient and the latter Sensible. But the relationship can be reversed through a conscious change in our determination so that my right hand can become Sentient and my left Sensible. Both Sentient and Sensible in this chiasm are entwined. Either hand can become object or else subject depending on how we want to perceive the relation. The idea of entwinement in Merleau-Ponty (he uses the term *Entrelac*) is influenced by a similar idea in Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938). Both seem similar to Fichte's idea of an entwinement of subject and object, and that of Fichte's contemporary the poet Hölderlin's idea of an original unity of both in Being which subsumes both of these. (N.B. *Entrelac* is a form of design where geometric patterns are intertwined. The word is related to *enlacer* = embracing, entwining as in lovers embracing).

If the original foundational positing of the I is an act that founds the possibility of both the objectivity and subjectivity, it also precedes our subjective I that we experience in our

ordinary everyday reality. We are consciously aware of things in the world and of ourselves as subject to these. But we are not immediately aware of a more basic I that brings both these kinds of consciousness into being. What is the relationship between the original I and the conscious I? This question opens the door to the idea of the Unconscious: we are not aware of most of the activity of the I. Fichte in his *New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre* (1797) stated that:

'in addition to the act of self-positing which you have at present raised to clear consciousness, you must also think of this act as preceded by another act of self-positing.' (New Presentation, Chapter 1 Section 1).

Sebastian Gardner in his book on the origins of the idea of the unconscious points out the influence this was to have on Freud a hundred years later, but also the way in which Freud, by ignoring the Idealist basis of this idea, created problems for himself. Fichte wants the I to be not just an explicit assertion of itself in distinction to the Non-I, but an activity preceding this. I = I occurs before I state it as such.

Gardner traces the development of the idea of the unconscious I, and the unconscious in general, through other German Idealists, especially Schelling, then into the 19th century until we eventually arrive at Freud's Unconscious. The problem with the Freudian theory however that despite bearing the traces of the German Idealists' 'unconscious I', Freud had jettisoned the Idealists' metaphysical underpinnings (in which the I is responsible for everything), and he attempts to ground his theory in materialist accounts of the mind which is conceived as the result of physical causes. This is clear in his *Entwurf einer Psychologie (Design for a Psychology)* of 1895, where he attempts to account for mental functioning in terms of

energy flows across neural pathways. Such a description of the mind would be much closer to the materialism or 'dogmatism' that Fichte constantly criticises. It has also stored up trouble for psychoanalysis. If the unconscious mind is material, how can we at the same time regard it as being my own? In what sense is it the I operating, and not some other object or thing? Freud wants the Unconscious to be part of who I am but his abandonment of an Idealist basis for this fundamental position creates contradictions and difficulties, and leaves psychoanalysis open to attack. These weaknesses were pointed out by Sartre

'By the distinction between the 'id' and the 'ego', Freud has cut the psychic whole into two. I am the ego but I am not the id. I hold no privileged position in relation to my unconscious psyche. I am my own psychic phenomena in so far as I establish them in their conscious reality [...] But I am not those psychic facts, in so far as I receive them passively and am obliged to resort to hypotheses about their origin and true meaning [...] I can know myself only through the mediation of the other, which means that I stand in relation to my 'id', in the position of the Other.' (Sartre: *Being and Nothingness*, quoted by Gardner)

There are other respects in which Fichte anticipates Freud. Fichte attempted to explain why it is that the I can on the one hand posit an objective world of causes and effects and on the other a sphere in which ideas, concepts and the possibility of action reigns. He did this by describing different *drives* all originating from the I. The drives allow us to experience the world in different ways. There is a natural drive which allows us to ascribe a sense of necessity and causality to nature:

The upshot of the present investigation is therefore as follows: just as certainly as I am, I must just as certainly ascribe

causality to nature; for I can posit myself only as a product of nature. (Fichte System of Ethics, (1798) PART II p. 116)

In itself we do not experience this natural drive as coming from us. We seem to be affected by it but are not immediately conscious of its acting as a drive. Nature appears to be coming to us from the outside unchangeable and necessary. But the result of our reflecting on the drive allows us to see it as something closer to what it is:

'Nor is the drive my product; it is a product of nature, as was said above. It is given, and it does not depend upon me in any way. Nevertheless, I become conscious of this drive, and what it brings about within consciousness is something that stands within my power; or, more precisely, the drive does not act efficaciously within consciousness, but it is I who act efficaciously or do not act efficaciously, in accordance with this drive. Here lies the point of transition of the rational being to self-sufficiency; here lies the determinate, sharp boundary between necessity and freedom.' (Fichte System of Ethics, PART II p. 120)

...and again:

'The form of this drive – i.e., the fact that it is a drive accompanied by consciousness – has its ground in the free act of reflection; that there is any drive at all and that the drive or the desiring is directed toward a certain precise object has its ground in nature – not, however, as was pointed out above, in any foreign nature, in the nature of the objects, but rather in my own nature; the ground in question is an immanent one.- Freedom is therefore already manifest in desiring, for an act of free reflection intervenes between longing and desiring.' (Fichte: System of Ethics, PART II p. 121).



Fichte

If we reflect on a natural drive (although previously we experience it as a necessary part of our nature) we can gain mastery over it, it becomes a drive that is my own, or rather a specific feeling, which we can act on or not according to the free use of our reason. There is something in this that reappears in the practice of psychoanalysis, by which reflection on a drive, an indeterminate impulse, identifies it as a feeling and brings it into the sphere of moral choice and action.

And what is Nature for Fichte? Nature appears to us as caused, necessary and affecting us from an external source. But at the same time, it is nature for us, from our own perspective, from our own point of view. Nature is not given directly to us; we set it up around us.

'This assumption of a new reality outside of me is a further determination of my world, an alteration of the latter within my consciousness. My world, however, is determined through its opposition to or contrast with me; that is, the world as I originally find it, the world that is supposed to exist without any assistance from me, is determined by its opposition to me, through its contrast with me as

*I necessarily find myself to be, not as I perhaps ought to make myself freely. At the basis of any change (a changed view) of my world, there would therefore have to lie some change (a changed view) of myself. If, therefore, I were able to change something in myself by means of my will, then my world would necessarily be changed as well; and by displaying the possibility of the former that of the latter would be explained as well. “My world is changed” means “I am changed”; “my world is determined further” means “I am determined further.” (Fichte: *System of Ethics*, PART II p. 73-74)*

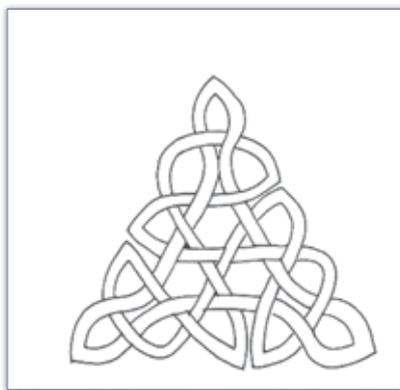
The idea that we are living in The World but the world for us - Our World around us which can alter as our perspective and actions alter, anticipates the Phenomenology of Husserl and the idea of the ‘Life World’ (*Lebenswelt*) in contemporary philosophers like Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929).

Finally, we can see a prefiguring of Existentialism in Fichte’s idealism. His conception of freedom as thinking and acting independently of nature, is reflected in his description of intellectual activity as being without any nature at all and deriving its freedom from that. When it comes to an object, its own nature and characteristics determines what it is and how it behaves whether it is a passive piece of material or even a mechanism such as a spring which appears to have an inner reactive force. Ideas or acts of thinking on the other hand,

have no nature and are free for that reason. This claim resembles Sartre’s assertion (although he uses very different terminology) that with human existence, unlike with material objects, Existence precedes Essence. Human consciousness can never actually be, in the way that a table is a table or a spring is a spring, because these have characteristics and a human is – advance of characteristics. This gives humans indeterminacy, anxiety and consequently freedom. Here is Fichte’s description of the contrast:

*‘This is why a thing cannot be thought of as determining itself, since it does not exist prior to its nature (i.e. the total sum of its determinations). As was just said, something that is supposed to determine itself would, in a certain respect have to be before it is, before it has properties and any nature at all. This can be thought only under our presupposition, under which, however, it can be thought very easily. As an intellect with a concept of its own real being, what is free precedes its real being, and the former [that is, the intellect] contains the ground of the latter [that is, its own real being]. The concept of a certain being precedes this being, and the latter depends upon the former. (Fichte: *System of Ethics*, §2 Problem To become conscious in a determinate manner of the consciousness of one’s original Being. Genetic Description of the Consciousness in Question p. 40’.)*

The aspects of Fichte's philosophy that I have briefly described show his continuing relevance to recent philosophy and psychology. This is especially so with the contemporary philosophy of mind, where the primary mental activity is seen as engagement with the world and, based on that, consciousness is given as a second activity. There are many aspects to this in Fichte's thought and many ways in which he influenced his contemporaries and successors, which we can return to on another occasion.



Entrelac

'Amore' by the Italian artists Sara Berti



A Falling-Out (Bloch vs. Adorno)

CHRIS NORRIS



Human longing in both forms – as impatience and as waking dream – is the mainsail into the other world. This intending toward a star, a joy, a truth to set against the empirical, beyond its satanic night, and especially its night of incognito, is the only way still to find truth.

Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*

Kitsch evokes a future utopia looking back at a past that is selectively (mis)remembered, thereby helping to stabilize the present toward which kitsch is otherwise deeply antagonistic.

Theodor W. Adorno, *Essays on Music*

Jazz is the false liquidation of art — instead of utopia becoming reality it disappears from the picture.

Adorno, ‘Perennial Fashion – Jazz’

No stuff so crap it kills all future-hope.
Don’t give up yet, keep sifting through the trash.
Utopia lies beyond negation’s scope.

The trash-pile reaches skyward, yet we’ll cope.
See how the tin-pan-handlers cut a dash.
No stuff so crap it kills all future-hope.

Give those junk-culture merchants enough rope
To hang stuff out, then see it gleam and flash.
Utopia lies beyond negation’s scope.

That optimistic twist’s my favourite trope.
It means there’s more to junk than just hard cash.
No stuff so crap it kills all future-hope.



Adorno

Teddy objects, but he's a misanthrope
Who says 'don't value-add the vandals' stash'.
Utopia lies beyond negation's scope.

He'd have it I'm the kind of wide-eyed dope
Who falls for every fad that makes a splash.
No stuff so crap it kills all future hope.

I say 'ease up, just watch the latest soap
Or hear some decent jazz', but then we clash.
Utopia lies beyond negation's scope.

Wide-eyed I may be, but he's a myope
Who shuns the world for fear his world may crash.
No stuff so crap it kills all future hope.

He can't see how it's like an isotope
Of gold, or Hopkins' gold-vermillion gash.
Utopia lies beyond negation's scope.

Met up years later; I said 'why not grope
Toward the light, and hope it won't look rash?
No stuff so crap it kills all future hope'.

Sometimes they seem just an excuse to mope,
Those thoughts of his, like concept-teeth to gnash.
Utopia lies beyond negation's scope.

Much rather head blue-skyward up the slope
From Grand Hotel Abyss than bide the smash.
No stuff so crap it kills all future hope.

Now they treat me as Teddy's antipope,
He dark and subtle, me upbeat and brash.
Utopia lies beyond negation's scope;
No stuff so crap it kills all future hope.



Ernst Bloch

Notes of the Wednesday Meeting 22nd November 2017

Paul Cockburn

One of the topics discussed in the meeting is the starting point of philosophy. There is a choice in philosophy between the outside/in and the inside/out – in other words you can emphasize exterior factors affecting the subject, or you can choose the internal factors of the psyche/subject (such as imagination) being key to philosophical enquiry. The difference between analytical philosophy and continental philosophy was explained in this light.

There was a suggestion that when faced with so many philosophers to read, the choice of which one to read is based on the story of the philosopher's life, rather than his philosophical ideas. Is this another version of Fichte's idea that the starting point of philosophy depends on the type of person you are? Perhaps more relevant Nietzsche's idea that philosophy is the confession of the philosopher. May be the life trajectory of the philosopher and the reader coincides. A related point was the relationship between German and French philosophers and how the former have been interpreted by the latter. Which of the German philosophers was more relevant to the French: Marx, Freud and Nietzsche or Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger? Was the materialist/idealist philosophy the deciding factor?

The materialism of music was discussed. Music seems to affect us in a deep way. In Protestantism much of the symbolism of Christianity such as statues and incense has diminished in influence, but it may have been replaced by congregational singing which has a deep communal spiritual effect.

The exhibition at the Ashmolean on religious art was discussed. This was linked to the current

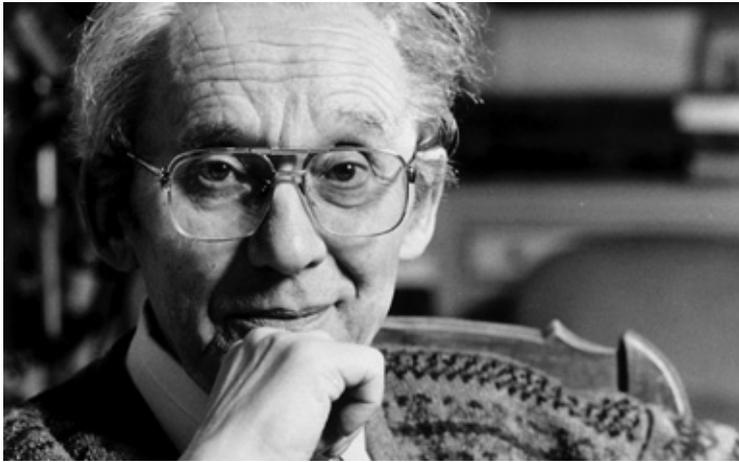
BBC series on the radio by Neil MacGregor on 100 religious objects. Votive religious objects have a religious meaning, which is 'super-imposed' on the physical religious object such as a statue. So, in Buddhism you can look at the footprints of the Buddha and 'take off' into the spiritual realm following his footsteps. We have to link the material to the spiritual rather than dividing, as nature can be linked to the spiritual by poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge.

Ricoeur was again discussed in terms of his views on the symbolic imagination. Symbols are on the bios/logos boundary, between the primeval emotional realm and the world of words and logic. They are mysterious, hard to pin down, and point to something beyond.

David Clough adds:

Sophie Vaclos in her book: *Literature and Imagination* (2014) made a note on Ricoeur and Coleridge. Coleridge believed that the symbol reached into or penetrated reality rendering it intelligible as a bridge between nature and our imaginative consciousness. If so, then Ricoeur's symbol gives rise to thought. He says something similar to Coleridge but without a direct fusion of nature and consciousness, though, because it does seem to transgress its finite origins, if fuzzier than the world of concepts. There is still a distinction between bios and logos, though the symbol be rooted in the pre-semantic.

Comparing Coleridge and Ricoeur versions of the symbol is like multiple narratives up the problematic hillside (trying to get up the hill from different directions) its surplus of possible routes and meanings that helps it. Obviously, the hill itself is such a symbol.



Ricoeur



A statue of Vishnu at the Ashmolean Exhibition

Notes of the Wednesday Meeting of 29th November 2017

Paul Cockburn

The meeting started with David Burridge reading two poems on the theme of exile, 'Going Abroad' and 'Asylum Seeker'. We then discussed Kant's Categorical Imperative.

The Categorical Imperative states we should act 'only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law'. One suggestion was this would mean that we should examine ethical and moral actions in terms of utilitarian principles, so we should choose to take actions which benefit the greatest number of people. Some suggested that 'utility' and 'usefulness' were problematic concepts. Moral choices are more complicated.

We need to be pragmatic and empirical in our moral and ethical choices perhaps. It is probably a lot easier to provide water facilities to all who need them rather than trying to increase human happiness! Situational ethics which take account of specific contexts may be more practical than abstract concepts. This is all very different from the religious values

which were usually the basis for moral choices before Kant.

David Clough reported back on the Post-Kantian meeting last week at the Philosophy Faculty of Oxford University:

Brian O'Connor was invited to give a talk. He talked about Marx and Hegel. They argued for a motivation not to be idle. With Kant duty looms but he stressed the idea of worthiness, and the more Hegelian idea about recognition being linked to actions being satisfying. But O'Connor queried whether Honneth was right that it was ethical, and not just pragmatic. *Bildung* (education) can be seen as a degraded religious call (Kierkegaard still has Christ as model) but Kant sought to generalize it without a model. Can it work? Thomas Mann thought there was a danger of too much inwardness.

O'Connor seemed quite warm about Ricoeur, suggesting a comparison with Adorno, particularly over ideology.

When Shakespeare met the psychoanalysts

Analyse Thou, at the Jam Factory, Oxford

What happens to Shakespeare and his characters when they are relocated to the modern world? This is what the new play, *Analyse Thou*, at the Jam Factory in Oxford last Wednesday tried to show. The characters move from the domain of the theatre to that of psychology, perhaps with emphasis on mental illness and marriage problems. They become curious cases for psychoanalysts. Are there here similarities with the Greek tragedies? It does seem so. One can talk now about Hamlet, Macbeth or Titania's complexes, in a similar way to Oedipus and other complexes. In all cases sex seems to be the cause of the disorder.

Analyse Thou which was produced by the Oxford Theatre Makers looks at three plays by Shakespeare: Hamlet, Macbeth and *Midsummer Night's Dream* and subject the main characters of these plays to psychoanalysis. Is it a comedy or tragedy? Well it is a parody of both, resulting in very funny situations.

Something perhaps is lost in the time-transformation, deep insight into human characters has been replaced by the mechanism of psychoanalysis. We are back to the question that puzzled twentieth century philosophy and beyond: Is there more to human beings than the total sum of their drives and instincts? Psychology plays on the role of the drives. Theatre goes beyond it to look at the social context: there is more to being human than can be explained mechanically by science. We can't adopt a reductionist account of a human

being, here represented by tragic characters in the cases of Hamlet, Macbeth and his missus, without a loss. What we need is an understanding that goes beyond some standard formulae, such as complex grief disorder or persecution complex. The play shows the stark contrast between the traumatised and tortured souls and the cold and dispassionate psychologists. The psychologist talks about the progress report at the end of the first scene in a very clinical way in contrast to the uncontrollable behaviour of the patient. The doctor seems to be optimistic no matter what.

When looked through the lenses of science, the human being may appear to be a comic creature. It seems that what his life revolves round are natural needs and desires that border on the animal. In fact, in the second scene, Macbeth compares himself to a dog controlled by his wife. Perhaps, Titania with all her vulgarity and donkey dreams is a caricature of the human treated purely in scientific terms. This can apply to more Shakespearian characters and indeed I was told by Woodward when I interviewed him that the list of characters could be expanded, so 'watch this space,' he said. Hamlet was quoted in one scene saying: 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.' It should have been adjusted appropriately to say '...in your psychology.'

I found Macbeth's support for the SNP (from the badge he had on his jacket) a good reference to the present. Also, the removal of Titania to

Hollywood is appropriate and imaginative. Jeremy Allen referred to her in my talk with him as ‘Elizabeth Taylor.’ The contrast between the characters as imagined by Shakespeare and the present writers could be comical but apt and provides the element of entertainment for the audience.

Analyse Thou was devised, written and performed by Jeremy Allen, Jodana Janse Van Vuuren and Lee Woodward (of the Ruff Trade Theatre Company). Van Vuuren was replaced in the present performance by Jenny Johns a very able actress. The present director is Chris Michael.

The three actors: Allen, Woodward and Johns appeared in all the scenes. The play was first performed last year as part of the Shakespeare’s 400th anniversary. Since then, the main characters have been slightly modified and different ending was suggested. The present production is the fourth since last year. According to Allen, it is hoped that it can be appreciated by scholars, as well as the general public. Allen told the press ‘... you can appreciate it on two levels even if you are not an expert.’ I wasn’t expert but I did really enjoy the performance.

Rahim Hassan



Jeremy Allen as Hamlet



A modern take on Midsummer Night’s Dream



Analyzing Hamlet with: Jenny Johns, Lee Woodward and Jeremy Allen

Belief, Faith and Knowledge

by DAVID JONES and PETER STEPHENSON

There is a widely accepted theory in epistemology that knowledge is justified true belief (JTB). It was challenged by Gettier in the early sixties. But does belief mean faith? The following article aims to show the differences between all these terms:

If 'knowledge' is a belief that is true and for which there is a satisfactory 'justification' (logos) then 'belief' is not the opposite or absence of knowledge, it is one of the necessary conditions or essential aspects of 'knowledge'. To illustrate this, imagine trying to know something (which happens to be true and for which justification is readily available) while not believing it.

Is 'faith' just another word for 'belief'? The meaning of 'faith' is often confused with the meaning of 'belief', as if the two words always had the same meaning which, however, appears not to be the case. As shown above, belief is a necessary component of the cognition we call knowing. 'Faith', on the other hand, is often used as a doing word, a qualifier of action, as illustrated in sayings such as 'the faithful servant', or 'he faithfully wound the clock every day for twenty years'. If a husband or wife is described as faithful then the criterion which makes being faithful true would seem to refer to behaviour and perhaps the continuity of actions required to successfully achieve a long-term project such as being a parent. However, this type of use of 'faith' is not appropriate to all forms of action. What is a specific type of action that corresponds to this use of the word 'faith'?

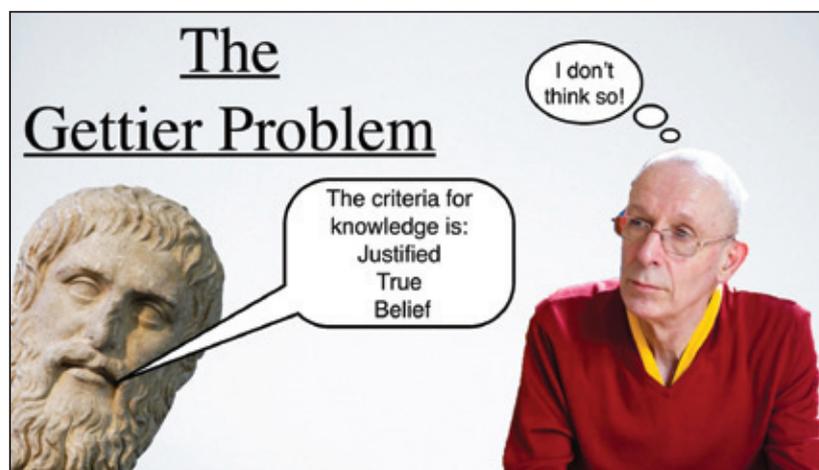
There is a type of acting and being-acted-upon process that is sometimes called 'hylomorphism'. This refers to a specific relation between two things which are sometimes called 'agent' and 'patient'. Though each one could be described

separately they are in a relationship where one forms the other. Such forming, or changing, is effected within a patient (as material) when it receives a forming impulse from an outside agent. In some examples this forming is akin to sculpting a continuous material and in other examples to forming an arrangement out of previously separate things.

The simplest (idealised) version of the hylomorphic relation between two things, which is easiest to comprehend and is consequently most well-known, is where only one of the two things is understood as being active and the other is understood as wholly passive. (The agent, which acts upon something, and the patient, which is being acted upon or suffering the action of another thing, are two of the ten categories of Aristotle.) The simplest description of form acting upon material can be extended to more complex configurations in which the relation between form and material in hylomorphic relationships is co-relative, such that layer upon layer of distinct things can be acting upon each other so that at any point in the sequence of layers the higher layer is forming the next lower. For example, if one layer is the actions of an artist who forms a lower layer of material, such as stone or paint, then the next higher layer could be a curator who arranges the material of the artist's finished work to form an exhibition of works; or as another example, individual sounds arranged (formed) into syllables, and then syllables arranged into words, and then words arranged into statements and so on.

However, there are sometimes circumstances of transactional change in which an active agent - acting upon some thing which is changed by receiving its activity - also requires that the one receiving does some complementary action that is necessary for the proper realisation of a potential change to be received. An illustration of this is the transaction that takes place in teaching and learning. The teacher might be thought of as the active agent and the student, by contrast, might be considered to receive the learning by passively receiving the form of the teaching. But from this example it will be apparent that some activities are expected to be accomplished by a student and these will also be necessary to realise the developmental changes that the teacher's actions, as form, have the potential to achieve in the student, as matter. Examples of such actions might be preparation, attention and consolidation. The potential of the learning is only actualised if both the teacher and student perform and coordinate the complementary actions that are necessary to achieve the realisation of the learning transaction.

This provides a possible explanation of why the word 'faith', in some cases, seems to be used to



Gettier vs. Plato

describe the activities of people who are involved in projects which require the cooperation of two or more agents and the mutual coordination of their actions towards a common purpose. Examples are as varied as traditional religious activities in which the supplicant completes the sacred actions to become the recipient of beneficence, or the parties to a marriage who act together to realise the development of their children. Perhaps this is why marriage and the practice of a religion are sometimes pictured analogously through the imagery of the other.

Keeping in mind that the word 'faith' sometimes refers to a meaning that is not synonymous with the word 'belief' could provide a useful additional perspective when trying to understand documents from the periods before the modern scientific world conception.

The Wednesday

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