

The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group at Albion Beatnik - Oxford

Editorial

The philosopher and his age

We have two statements regarding philosophers and philosophy that look similar on the face of it, but they are not really. Fichte, followed by Schelling in his early writing, suggested that there is no fixed starting point for philosophy: it all depends on the type of the person you are. You can be a dogmatic and you don't value freedom or you can be critical and in favour of freedom for yourself and for the world you live in. Nietzsche, on the other hand, maintained that philosophy is an autobiography of the philosopher himself. This is perhaps why he chose the title *Ecce Homo* for his last book before his mental collapse.

The emphasis in both cases seems to be on the type of person you are. But these philosophers were writing in different worlds. Fichte was writing when Germany was divided, weak and was about to be invaded by Napoleon. He was also writing in the cultural and political climate created by the French Revolution. In both cases, freedom became the main concern of the age. He was also writing in the light of Kant's famous essay *What is Enlightenment?* In which he argued for the freedom to think independently of any authority (church or state). Fichte considered himself more radical than Kant. He criticised Kant (and so did Schelling when he was under the influence of Fichte) for allowing something beyond the grasp of the Subject, the thing in itself, or of the latter having influence on the Subject. Total freedom is what Fichte was after. Despite the change in his view of the French Revolution, (and this apply to intellectuals in Germany and England), freedom remained the paramount aim of his philosophical thinking.

freedom of the individual to think independently of external influences, had such an influence on his contemporaries. Fichte made this the subject of one of his famous essays: *On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy*. He tried to show that it is not the letter of the philosopher whom they all respected (Kant) that is important but its spirit; otherwise one loses his freedom of thought and independence. This was his way of philosophising, and well as that of the most important figures among his contemporaries, including Schelling, Hegel, Schiller and the Romantics.

Nietzsche on the other hand was philosophising in a different age. Germany was marching to victory and unity. The spirit that Fichte wanted to raise in the Germans with his *Discourses to the German Nation* is no longer relevant. The opposite is true for Nietzsche who criticised the excess of militarization and nationalism. Free will also came in for criticism in his philosophy because he tried to reduce the Subject to nature. For Nietzsche, it is the natural drives that think and move man and not the other way round as it was with Fichte. To put it differently, Fichte was philosophising in the age of Idealism (or what Hegel calls Spirit) while Nietzsche was philosophising in the age of Materialism (especially of the Ludwig Buchner version).

Maybe both Fichte and Nietzsche are right about the sources of philosophising: mind (or Idealism first) and body (or Naturalism second). But it may also be true that in both cases philosophising is not a free-floating activity but a reflection of its time. The question is, what is the philosophy of our time? This is a topic to which we will dedicate more discussion in the future.

It is interesting to note that Kant who argued for the

The Editor

Theories of Progress in Science: Popper and Kuhn

There were many theories to explain the progress in science and its method. The following article which will be published in two parts discusses two major theories: Karl Popper's theory of Falsification, and Kuhn's theory of Paradigms. It argues that there is a gap between theory and reality and calls for a realist reading of science:

Part 1

PAUL COCKBURN

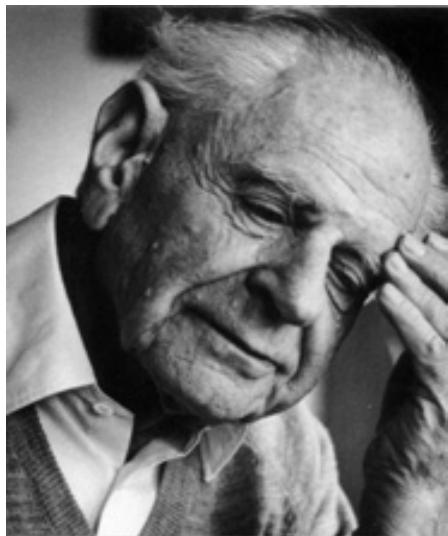
I would like to address the issue 'in what sense can we say does science progress?' mainly with reference to two philosophers of science, Karl Popper and Thomas Kuhn. Sixty years ago, it would have been generally accepted that science progresses, very much in a linear fashion. People had just witnessed the unleashing of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and in the first 50 years of the twentieth century the world of the atom had been opened up, quantum theory discovered, Einstein proposed his theories of relativity, and the structure of DNA was unravelled. Science was objective, scientific theories could be tested experimentally to see if they were true or not, and scientific knowledge was ever increasing. The picture now is different. So, I would like to start by looking at some important aspects of the philosophy of science in the early twentieth century.

The logical positivists such as Schlick and Carnap of the Vienna Circle in the 1920s emphasised the principle of verifiability. What statements are true? What constitutes truth? Logical analysis was key, and they developed the work of Frege to derive a propositional calculus. The logical positivists and empiricists of the Vienna circle held that we should be able to verify what statements are

true, and Carnap tried to construct a theory-independent observation language. Science had to be based on empirical observation, and metaphysics was to be banished. This ran into a number of problems, not least the problem of induction. We cannot prove 'all swans are white', and in science we cannot assume the results of experiments will be the same in the future as now.

Karl Popper

Karl Popper proposed the falsification principle as a replacement for verifiability in terms of a scientific methodology. One instance of a black swan disproves the principle 'all swans are white'. There is a basic asymmetry here in that it takes only one instance to refute a theory, but even if we have thousands of confirmations in terms of white swans it still does not prove conclusively that all swans are white. History seems to show us we can't have certain knowledge, nothing in science seems to be certain. The clearest example of this is Newton's theories of time, space, motion and gravity, which were outstandingly successful for 250 years, but which were overturned by Einstein's theory of relativity. Popper believed we should have the attitude that all theories might be wrong, so that we test them to the limit, rather than trying to verify



Karl Popper

them. We should propose bold conjectures in science, which could be tested by experiment. He coined the phrase ‘conjectural realism’ for this. He wanted to define and propose a clear methodology for science.

Although he thought induction irrational, he still thought there was progress in science, based on the falsification principle, which acted as a regulatory principle to ‘keep science on track’. Over time, Popper thought science was progressing by studying problems of ever increasing depth.

Popper wrote at great length about the poverty of historicism, which consists of trying to derive historical laws from studying history. We cannot predict the future from the past. This has some relevance to Kuhn, who did exactly that! Popper proposed three basic entities in the world – World 1 entities which were matter and forces, the subject matter of physics, World 2 entities which were psychological, and World 3 entities which were products of the human mind.

One consequence of falsificationism for Popper was that Marxism, Freud and Jung, psychoanalysis etc. were not really sciences because they cannot be disproved. It is too easy



Thomas Kuhn

to adjust the theory to take into account new facts. Falsification, the ability to test theories and prove them wrong, distinguishes science from non-science. There is something wrong Popper thought with a theory that cannot be tested. A ‘good’ scientific theory would be a bold conjecture, with consequences which could be empirically tested.

Thomas Kuhn

However, in the last forty years the social sciences have grown and some would say that ‘pure’ science as Popper and the logical positivists conceived it (largely in the physical sciences) has been diluted by sociology, anthropology etc. Indeed, the concept of science as rational knowledge has been under attack from the ‘social constructivists’. This process was largely started I believe by the work of Thomas Kuhn, who published a remarkable book in 1963 called ‘The Structure of Scientific Revolutions’. In this he looked at the history of science, and proposed a somewhat relativistic view. There was no gradual change or progress - by looking mainly at the Copernican and Einsteinian revolutions, he attempted to show that established theories were simply overturned and replaced by new ones. In any scientific area, there was a pre-paradigm period, where a number of

competing theories existed. Perhaps after a major discovery, the area becomes mature and a community of scientists agree on a particular set of theories, a 'paradigm' (much maligned word!). 'Normal' science would then be carried out, where the working out of the established paradigm would occur according to a research program. Anomalies would then occur, and a new theory would be proposed to account for these. However competing theories were incommensurable (could not be measured against one another), so there was no rational process by which 'the right one' could be chosen.

Kuhn's use of the word 'paradigm' was initially not clearly defined. It is basically a theory agreed by scientists, but Kuhn used it in a number of ways, particularly with regard to its scope. Sometimes it was very large, a world-view, at other times it was much more limited. Kuhn tried to define it better, and came up with two separate meanings. One was a global sense of paradigm which embraces all the shared commitments (the beliefs, values, techniques etc.) of a scientific group. Part of this global paradigm was a smaller type of paradigm, which he renamed 'exemplars'. The global paradigm is essentially a disciplinary matrix, which scientists follow in their work and research. It consists of: exemplars (specific exemplary puzzle solutions), metaphysical beliefs, values such as simplicity, fruitfulness, accuracy and precision, consistency, breadth of scope, heuristic models, symbolic generalizations.

Exemplars are used to train scientists in terms of what is a good solution for a problem, how it should be solved, and what is a good problem to tackle. Kuhn likens exemplars to cryptic crosswords, to emphasize that some puzzles are not solved by simple rules but by intuition. So, on this understanding, normal science uses exemplars to solve problems until anomalies are found and then new exemplars are needed

to solve them. Notice the similarity to Popper here – although modern philosophers of science tend to disparage him, I think his influence is still there in this talk of anomalies, which are a type of falsification.

Because theories were incommensurable, social factors and values were key in determining theory choice. Kuhn hinted at something we all know – that scientists are 'ordinary' human beings, often politically motivated, open to corruption, and keen to wield power. Taken to extremes, it can be postulated that scientific theories are socially constructed with little or no empirical basis. In fact, some would say the empirical basis is often a smokescreen for scientists in communities to wield power over us, perhaps for political purposes. The truth of a theory is something Kuhn says he can do without: he is epistemologically neutral on this. He believed that science progresses by more puzzles being solved, and he also believes only a rational choice of theory will enhance this puzzle solving power. But scientific theories do not correspond with any 'real world'. This is unknowable. So, Kuhn left the door open for the social constructivists to say that the choice of theories is not rational. Psychological, social and political factors could also play a part, and this is the hypothesis of social constructivists such as Bloor and Barnes.

The scientific community can close ranks and not be open to new ideas. A theory might not in fact be replaced until all the scientists who held the old rival theory died out. I would like give two examples which seem to show that there is something in this argument. I was listening to Radio 4 one day and heard about the aquatic ape. This is an evolutionary theory which holds that human beings evolved living on the sea-shore rather than on the African savannah. I think the accepted theory says we came out of the forest and started hunting on the plains, then we stood up on two feet etc.



The aquatic ape theory says that there are a number of facts which point to a water-based connection in human evolution: we can hold our breath under water for a long time, we have a layer of fat under the skin which would help insulate us from the effects of cold water, our mouth and larynx structure enable us to breathe through our mouths which would help in swimming.

I don't want to argue the case for either theory. What was interesting to me was the difficulty that the proponents of the aquatic ape theory had in getting the evolution establishment to listen to their theory with an open mind. They would not give it the time of day. It was apparently a completely open and shut case that man evolved on the African savannah.

Another example is the theory of plate tectonics in geology. If we look at the history of geology, in the 1800-1850s rock strata were studied and it was observed that rocks apparently moved over time, and marine fossils were discovered high in the mountains far away from the sea. But there was no mechanism to explain these

movements. Some geologists recognised that volcanoes and erosion were not enough to explain the large-scale movements in rock formation features. It was only in the 1950s when the theory of plate tectonics was put forward that a credible mechanism for rocks to be moved large distances, mountains to be created and earthquakes occur. These were all ultimately caused by tectonic plates some 50 km below the earth's crust, moving and colliding with one another. Again, I don't want to argue the case for plate tectonics in terms of detailed science. The point is that plate tectonics was initially ridiculed by the geological establishment.

It is interesting that both the theories given above deal with events way back in the past. It could be these theories are not open to being falsified – how can we repeat the experiment? Another factor in terms of plate tectonics is that even if we can measure the movements of the plates now, we may then assume they moved at a similar rate in the past. This again cannot be falsified or verified.

Thought-Communiqué: Nietzsche



CHRIS NORRIS

In 1865, while still a student, Nietzsche visited Cologne, where he was taken by friends to a brothel . . . In 1867 he was treated for a syphilitic infection which eventually led to the mental collapse of January 1889, effectively the end of Nietzsche's life, although he was to live, silent and lost in himself, until 1900.

John Banville, 'The Last Days of Nietzsche'

Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*



Some say such thoughts as mine must crack the brain.
My brain, it's said, pursued strange tracks of thought
Till madness struck. Another pet idea,
Much favoured lately, offers to explain
My silent state through some disease I caught
From that poor working girl, a souvenir
Of my first failed attempt to numb the pain
That came of nerves and intellect stretched taut
On paradox. All off-the-point, I fear,
Though why not give the fantasists free rein
Since there's no way yours falsely could resort
To claiming 'It's my life: the buck stops here,
You fiction-pedlars', flat against the grain
Of all my best-laid strategies to thwart
That old desire that truth shine bright and clear
Through falsehood, lie, and error.

'Too mundane

By half, too apt to sell his genius short,

That tale that puts it down to gonorrhoea.’
So say my future acolytes who strain
To outdo one another and cavort
With sense and logic at the far frontier
Of reason where truth’s allies scarcely deign
To tread. That’s why it leaves them so distraught,
My principled refusal to hold dear
Those so-called ‘laws of thought’ devised to chain
Free spirits down through logic’s grievous tort
Against the wisdom, joyous yet severe,
That bids us redefine what counts as ‘sane’
In Zarathustra’s wake. From is to ought
Then seems a course that those alone can steer
Who’ve ventured out from reason’s home terrain
After strange gods. Thought-voyaging, the sort
That changes lives and worlds, is apt to veer
So far from custom’s sacrosanct domain
That, should its case be heard before some court
Of last appeal, there’s no judge fit to hear
The differend between them.

Ask again

Why this protracted failure to report
My mental goings-on – this many-year-
Long silence on my part – and I’d refrain
From taking sides in the spectator sport
Of ‘Nietzsche: sick or mad?’. If they adhere
To one or other view it’s in the vain
Attempt to pin me down, the crude resort
To bivalent truth/falsehood, or the sheer
Stupidity that clings to the old bane
Of Plato’s heirs. This urges we transport
Ourselves beyond the dull sublunary sphere



Of sense and thus (the fable goes) attain
Pure soul-perfection. That's the lie I fought
By every means to hand, from those career-
Destroying early squibs that left a stain
On my c.v. to everything I taught
Concerning that long post-Platonic smear-
Campaign against the senses and the drain
Of strength, health and vitality it brought
To the near two-millennia fix that we're
Perhaps just getting over.

Don't complain,
My friends, that I've elected to abort
That project: not storm off in some King Lear-
Like temper-tantrum, simply feign
A cataleptic state as my retort
To those who lacked the acumen to hear
When Zarathustra spoke. If I maintain
A monkish rule of silence it's self-taught
Or learned from him, my teacher of austere
Yet orgiastic disciplines to train
Both mind and body in this strenuous sport
Of thinking guided always by an ear,
Like mine, acute enough to entertain
Such thoughts as lead the mental argonaut
Jenseits des Selbst. That's why I persevere
In my mute state, bear as my mark of Cain
This steady gaze that so disturbs my wrought-
Up guests, and speak in silence peer-to-peer
With those, like sage Spinoza, who remain
To vouchsafe truths no chatter can distort
Since known anew by each thought-pioneer.



‘Oxford Impressions’



by the Polish artist Monika Filipek

American Diary

Conscience Revolution 1964 – 1984

Nona M Ferdon has recently retired as a Consultant in Clinical Psychology. She is British, was born in Georgia, US. She went to University in Innsbruck, Austria. Then four years later moved to the University of Hawaii and worked at the East/West Centre. She did her Ph. D. at Berkeley University. Her thesis was an interdisciplinary one, in history and psychology. She then moved to Massachusetts to teach at the Universities of Massachusetts and North Eastern.

After returning to Europe in 1980, she was appointed a Professor at Webster University in Geneva where she lived for ten years. In 1990 she emigrated to Great Britain, renounced US citizenship, took British citizenship and worked as a Clinical Psychologist with a group on Devonshire Place in London. She has now retired to the country and lives her 'Epicurean years':

NONA M. FERDON

At the end of the chaotic Second World War The 'GIs' (and most of the nation), wanted only to regain the years they had lost. Get an education, find a 'job'. Find a wife and 'settle down' -- in little houses made of 'ticky tacky' as Pete Singer sang. It was Man in the Grey Flannel suit time.

But the next generational cohort had other ideas. It began a period sometimes referred to as the 'Conscience Revolution', - or 'The Culture Wars'. The next generational cohort wanted 'CHANGE'!

This was before the mood shift, before November 20th, 1963. John Kennedy's assassination became a personal milestone for nearly everyone alive at that time. Everyone wanted to believe that nothing had changed. But they were wrong.

The next year, 1964, brought the opening skirmishes of several new movements whose full meanings would reveal themselves. Berkeley (and many other Universities across the land) began to rage with 'Teach Ins' and other, more violent, activities.

The public begin fixating on issues of conscience and dissent. The erosion of confidence, beginning in 1964, could be said to signalled by a series of apocalyptic films, such as *Dr Strangelove*, *Seven Day in May* etc. The mood alternated between bliss and doom.

Many who were young at that time, late teenagers or young adults, burst forth with angry challenges. A major moral Rubicon was crossed when The National Guard gunned down a half dozen protesting students at Kent State University.



The killing scene at Kent State University in Ohio



The four students killed in the shooting (L to R): William Schroeder, Allison Krause, Jeffrey Miller and Sandra Lee Scheuer.

Earlier movements had been the work of 'the polite'. This one swarmed with outrage. Rioters despised the life of 'sterilised, mated contentment'. The 'awakening' generational cohort began to stir. Very soon there was blood on the streets.

From my perspective it split into two streams. Many of this generation began to dress down - unisex styles, and became self-declared 'freaks' as if to reject the affluence and civic order of the elders. In the late 1960s, students screamed at the 'pigs' (police) who tried to keep order while youth violence became 'as

American as apple pie'.

This 'stream' chose everything from 'Tune and drop out,' to 'make love and not war', and 'let's all become hippies and live in a commune'.

OR

'What actions can we take to make the world better'? What does this *mean??* *What shall I do??* (Perhaps a vague attempt at Stoicism of which I was totally ignorant at the time) or even a whiff of-- ??? 'The unexamined life'?!'

Philosophical Reflections

A thought experiment about morality - a 'republic' of one

DAVID JONES

Motivations for guiding behaviour are sometimes explained by derivation from religious world-conceptions and sometimes from reasoned attempts to avoid conflict while living with others. What would remain to guide behaviour if neither framework were relevant?

If an atheist found himself, or herself, alone on a desert island with no neighbours then the atheist might, at first, feel liberated from law and the desire to secure the good opinion of others. However, after a period of adjustment, the atheist might conclude that life must still be lived in the light of one's own experience of oneself, and decide that he does not want to be someone who wastes resources or harms animals, and does not wish to waste opportunities for developing potential human capacities. Even on a desert island there is one whose judgment you cannot escape, the judgment of your present self, which you carry forward into the future, of everything you did in your past.

A Flaneur around Oxford Bookshops

The Wednesday will run a series of articles on the theme of bookshops in Oxford. We start here with a flaneur who enjoyed visiting bookshops for a quarter of a century:

DAVID CLOUGH

Before I moved to Oxford in September 1995 I had visited Hay-on-Wye a few times. Oxford then had as many bookshops, possibly as many as famous colleges. Bookshops then were more in vogue than festivals. In Turl street there was Titles which was followed by Unsworths. The latter had a slightly more *New Age* feel arguably and in 1998 or 1999 in Thornton's I bought George Pattison's 1992 (2nd edition) *Kierkegaard: the Aesthetic and the Religious* and ordered Stoddard Martin's *Art Messianism and Crime* about how Hesse was really Charles Manson!

Next door to Thornton's (I remember) was a specialist Judaica shop. There were around 35 bookshops in those days. Waterfields were in Park End Street before the Hi Fi shop moved in. The archaeology and Medieval specialist Oxbow were nearby. They did more than this but I betray my interest. Later when high end Hi Fi and also Richer Sounds (briefly) moved in. Waterfields moved to the High Street and Oxbow relocated to Hythe Bridge Street above the garage there, until they finally closed as a shop in February 2017.

Around 2002, I think Waterfields were selling off Owen Barfield's personal Library I remember. They often seemed to get collection-donations-bequests like that. But checking that Barfield died in 1997 it may have been earlier but I am sure it was after the move to the High Street. I wasn't that interested or convinced by Barfield myself at the time, though I did buy the secondary tome

by Simon Blaxland de Lange who purported to be his first biographer, and collaborated with him very late in 1997. The Waterfield books mostly weren't by Barfield himself either. It was his library collection etc containing the works of those others he treasured.

Another key site for me was Reservoir Books, (84, St Aldates), a unique fund-raising shop which had a lot of Second hand French Philosophy which was around at the bottom of St Aldates between 2000-2004. George Pattison and Richard Sorabji would drop in there. It was where Oxford Blue shop is now.

Unsworths, also had their main store in London which I occasionally visited. After Unsworths left Turl Street it became Oxfam's second such shop (adding to the older St Giles site) overlooked or secretly observed as it is by an old bollard (and its fairly hidden attendant camera both installed in 1999) from Doblin's Alexanderplatz perhaps installed by that ex-County Council Engineer who liked to be a flaneur, perhaps a voyeur but never a dandy. The reference is to Bruno Alfred Döblin (10 August 1878 – 26 June 1957) who was a German novelist, essayist, and doctor, best known for his novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929). This is my Hesse and Benjamin city side peeping out I suppose, the Baudelaire I never was. It had to be corrected by either postmodernism or Catholic Classics of Spirituality at the bottom of St Aldates because you see the bottom of St Aldates had other religious toned bookshops.



St. Philip's Books



The Wednesday group at Albion Beatnik Bookstore
(L-R): David Clough, Ray Ellison, Barbara Vellacott, Paul Cockburn, Rahim Hassan and David Burrige. (Photographed by Mike Simera).



Blackwell's



Last Bookshop in Jericho, Oxford

The Catholic focused St Phillips Books is still there but there was another where Café Loco is now, though it disappeared during the Reservoir books years.

In those days we still met at Borders of course which opened in 1999 and closed ten years later at the end of 2009. Watching its last few months was a bit poignant and like Blackwell's now (though we bought books too) it had been like a vast library where the art and magazine

selection was particularly wide ranging. But I can hardly fail to remember all those Jung books I acquired at Jericho books when it was open (1998-2006?), before the letting agents took it over, but personally I didn't go much to the Cowley Road and Iffley Road ones like the Inner Bookshop in Magdalen Street, so they are not prominent in my own story. My '70s Protestant conscience probably but perhaps others have other sites and stories to tell.

Human nature or not human nature?

That is the question

'Yet it cannot be said too often that any conception of human rights without any conception of human beings is incoherent. ... We cannot respect each other in virtue of our common humanity, if it is denied that we share any such thing.' (Roger Trigg: *Ideas of Human Nature*, P188) and **'Yet if Shakespeare was dealing in the Elizabethan age with timeless truths about human nature, it may be that we can learn from him about human passions and needs.'** (Ibid, P189.)

DAVID BURRIDGE

The above statements seem to me to touch a fundamental reason for the search for Human Nature. Do we share a fundamental Truth, or are the cultural relativists the experts we should be listening to? How can a writer like Shakespeare (we are now celebrating 400 years anniversary of his death) really speak to us? I believe there are truths about human existence which do not change. Hamlet has been a play that has followed me through my life, and I have always admired the morality characterised by Hamlet. There are aspects of human existence described in 'To be or not to be', which remain unchanged, for example – *death*. We make decisions fashioned by that ultimate reality: 'The undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns puzzles the will'. Death and mortality had a limiting control on Heidegger's Dasein: 'Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein' (*Being and Time*, 50: 294.)

So, a common human experience can speak across cultures and centuries. For example, I had the pleasure of seeing a version of Hamlet in German, produced by the granddaughter of Bertolt Brecht. Despite the fact she introduced a style in keeping with her grandfather, the hard truth still came through:

'das unendliche Land, von des Bezirk
kein Wanderer wiederkehrt, den Willen
irrt, Das wir die Uebel, die wir haben
, lieber Ertragen als zu unbekannten
fliehen.'

According to Schleiermacher understanding other people's culture is not something we can take for granted. In his strict hermeneutic practice, we cannot guarantee a just or fully adequate understanding. We can easily fall prey to the tendency to filter another's speech or writing through one's own cultural, theological or philosophical frame of mind. In other words, I can only understand what I think Hamlet means because I have converted the characters and the language to suit my own understanding; I may be completely misunderstanding Shakespeare's meaning.

Of course, human nature is spread across a wide diversity of cultures and periods in history, and we do need to work through the detail to find the principle common to us all. I agree with Trigg: 'There is a cultural parochialism and arrogance in such attitudes that leave us with the prejudices of the moment..'. Each philosopher can speak to us and we can take the principles and see how they fit into our understanding of society.

Naturalists want to see human nature as a purely genetic evolution. If our behaviour is rooted in some genetic structure then it could be possible to find a common understanding as to why we are the way we are. But then what about reason, imagination and generally human striving intellectually and morally? If the genome is nothing more than a mechanism then we are only herd of animals needing only to munch and mate.



In his attack on the ‘blank slaters’ or culturalists, Steven Pinker uses a poet to sum up his argument. Quoting from the Emily Dickinson poem: *The Brain is wider than the sky*, he writes: ‘...the seat of our thought and experience is a hunk of matter.’ (page 424). But Dickinson was a mystical poet and here she is using the physical image to express the vast extent of the mind: ‘wider than the sky’ – ‘deeper than the sea’ – ‘just the weight of God.’

In his book: *Beyond Human Nature*, Prinz argues that human beings transcend nature: ‘We are products of culture and experience and not just nature.’ He does however accept that the biological is important and our behaviour is both cultural and biological. Or as Mary Midgely would put it (*Beast and Man*): We are animals with instincts, but these are open instincts, which means that we need experience and reason to develop our thoughts and behaviour.

We retain a complex of thoughts and behaviours within a culture to be transferred through the generations. Custom and practice is according to Hume the basis on which we tend to make decisions. So, this transfer is important and the method of transfer through the use of language is the telling of myths and stories. Jung tells us in his autobiography that the discovery of mythology was like ‘a catalyst upon the stored-up and still disorderly ideas within me’ and this led to him to write: *The Psychology of the Unconscious*. Language transfers important pictures through myths. If archetypal images can be transferred over centuries and still have meaning then there is arguably some form of human nature that transcends the complexity of different cultures. This may be true but as Hamlet says:

‘There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio than are dreamt of in ‘our’ philosophy.’

The Wednesday

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The Wednesday



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group at Albion Beatnik - Oxford

Written by friends.. for friends



Please keep your articles, artwork,
poems and other contributions coming.
Send all your contributions and comments to the editor at:
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Visit us at AB on Wednesday afternoons

