

The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group at Albion Beatnik - Oxford

Editorial

The Renewed Universe of Continuous Creation

The end of one year and the coming of another carry with them some anxiety that ranges from worrying at the passing of age to the more creative sense in which those who are creative think that they haven't achieved as much as they hoped for during the finishing year. At the bottom of this is the idea of life with all its potentials and possibilities. Death is the end of possibilities. Heidegger was right when he characterised death as the possibility that ends all possibilities. The anxiety then is about possibilities.

Taken on a cosmic scale, one realises how materialism and a narrow scientific look have accustomed us to the picture of the world as a finished product. The world is all that is, some philosophers have said. Scientists will provide the basis for this suggestion by the law of conservation of energy and matter. The world of extended matter that Descartes envisaged and for which Newton supplied his mechanical laws is one that is complete and fixed. This is what gave Nietzsche the idea that if physics is correct then we only expect an *Eternal Return* – a return of the same. However, Nietzsche seemed to see the consequences of his suggestion and he abandoned the attempt to prove it scientifically.

The picture of the universe as full of possibilities find its clearest description in the Sufi (mystical) tradition, particularly in the writing of the 12th to 13th century Islamic mystic Ibn Arabi. Ibn Arabi inherited six hundred years of Islamic culture, especially when it was most creative. His view of the universe, although in many ways unique to him, it is the best representation of an Islamic view and the most cogent to both intellectual and artist.

According to Ibn Arabi the universe is a self-disclosure of God. God reveals himself in the

world. Now this idea had been suggested in western thought since the Renaissance or Middle Ages. What is new and specific to Ibn Arabi is that this disclosure is always new and never repeated. The universe is newly created every moment not in the sense that it has been annihilated and re-created, as you might expect from Descartes and Occasionalism, or a reproduction of the same old universe, but in the sense that new possibilities are always being added and old things are passing away. His universe also has the property of life. He holds the principle of the prevalence (or running) of life through out the universe. The whole universe is alive, stones, mountains, water, trees and infinitely more. Matter and Intelligence are one for him. He considers the universe as a space of mercy created by the Divine Breathing. It is also the arena of the attributes of God (or the names of God) to exercise their power and causality. He also envisages the universe as being in continuous movement. There is the movement of the names from God to the world, the movement of the Idea of everything (or what he calls the Fixed Entities) from God's mind into manifestation. The movement within manifestation and the return of everything to God.

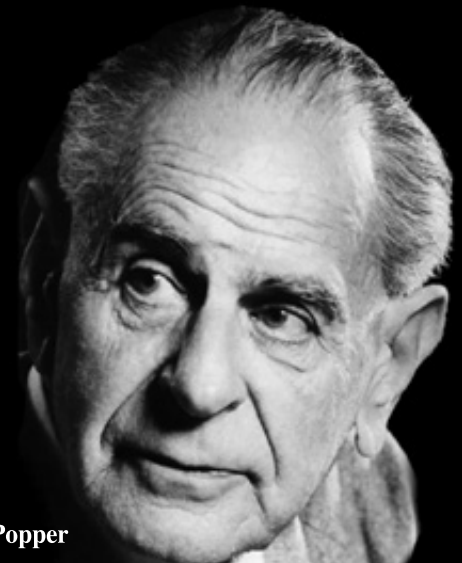
The lesson we get from organised. There is no room for complacency or despondency. The world is full of creativity and movement. This is the way it has been created and we have to be in line with such a universe. Artists and creative intellectuals know the power of Ibn Arabi's idea and know that there is more to do, more to create.

On behalf of the team of **The Wednesday**, I wish the readers of our magazine a Happy New Year, one that is full of productivity and creativity. I hope that we could realise that in the magazine throughout 2018.

The Editor

Karl Popper and his Critical Method

Following the article on theories of the philosophy of science, we publish here a full article on Karl Popper's method of falsification, critical examination and the value of critical thinking in shaping society.



Karl Popper

RANJINI GHOSH

Karl Popper's views on the method of verification and falsifiability have been crucial in the philosophy of science. We shall be focusing on his main views concerning the nature of science and the criterion of falsifiability. He is best known for his books, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945) and *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (1959).

Scientific Method

We must first understand the difference between a law of nature and a law of society to get a clear picture of the meaning of the word 'law'. A law of society is prescriptive in the sense that it tells us what to do and what not to do. It can be broken. A law of nature is not prescriptive but descriptive. It tells us what happens. For example, water boils at 100 degrees Celsius. It is nothing more than a statement and such a statement can be true or false but it cannot be broken. If water boils at 100 degrees then it is not a command or an order but merely a description.

Since the time of Newton, it has been accepted that the central task of science is to search for natural laws. The scientist carries out experiments and observations and from them he starts to formulate hypotheses, which are statements with a character of law that was to explain all known facts. The scientist tries to

fit the available facts from the real world to his hypothesis which supports them. If he succeeds then it could become a scientific law. This was the method of induction. From specific statements and facts, one could generalize. This method of induction in fact determined what was science and what was not science. Therefore, scientific statements were on experimental observations that are to be distinguished from any statements based on metaphysical concepts etc.

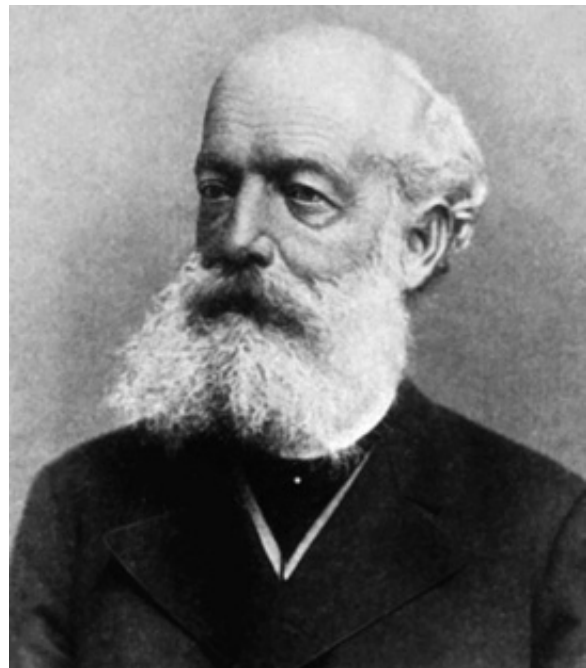
But David Hume pointed out that no matter how many observational statements we can have we still cannot generalize. If on a particular occasion event A is followed by event B, it does not follow that in the next instance the same will happen. Any number of such observations cannot lead us to say conclusively that the same thing will happen again. Science assumes a regularity of nature. The future will be exactly as the past has been. But Hume said that even if past events have been observed to show that A is followed by B we cannot observe future events. This cannot even be established logically. So, Hume said there is no way of validating the method of induction. Bertrand Russell said that Hume had proved that pure empiricism is not a sufficient basis for science.

Karl Popper tried to give a solution to this problem of induction. He pointed out that there

is a logical asymmetry between verification and falsification. Even if we make a number of observations of white swans and logically derive a universal statement that 'all swans are white', then if we observe a single black swan we can derive a statement 'not all swans are white'. Therefore, empirical generalizations like this one are not verifiable but falsifiable. The logic of the situation is that if a single black swan can be seen then all swans cannot be white. In logic we look at the relation between statements.

A scientific law is falsifiable but not conclusively verifiable. But at a methodological level one could always doubt a statement like all swans are white. One could always say that the bird was wrongly identified etc. A scientist may reject all such evidence of falsification. Suppose we say that there is a law that water boils at 100 degrees Celsius. We can take any number of observations of this but we cannot prove it. But we can always find some instance where water does not boil at this temperature. For example, in closed containers. So, we can now refine our original statement and say that water boils at 100 degrees Celsius in open containers. We can again try to refute this statement by pointing out that this does not happen in high altitudes. Then we have to qualify again our earlier statement by stating that water boils at 100 degrees Celsius in open containers at sea level atmospheric pressure. This process of refutation goes on. It is only in this way that Popper believes that science can give more valid explanations for natural phenomena.

If we had tried to verify our original statement that water boils at 100 degrees Celsius by gathering any number of observations that prove our statement, this would not have proved the truth of the statement. We can never say that anything is true because there might be some instance in future which will show that it is not true. This has always happened in history. Therefore, Popper says it is a mistake for scientists to try to prove a theory since any such



Friedrich August Kekule

attempt is logically impossible. What we can always show is that there is a better explanation of some phenomena. It is a mistaken notion that science is a body of established facts.

Popper believes that any notion of the truth of a statement being in correspondence with facts is not a correct idea. Whatever measurements we make in time and space are only best approximations. Nothing can be exactly millimeters. Popper was led to this belief by Einstein's challenge to Newton's theories. For a long time, Newton's explanation regarding space and time held ground. But it was Einstein who showed for the first time that it was only one explanation of celestial mechanics. He had a better explanation for the same.

Bryan Magee (Magee, Bryan, *Philosophy and the Real World*, Open Court, 1985) says that Popper is a reconstructed Kantian. Kant constructed his theory to solve the paradox of existence, but he was in error. The error was to be convinced that Newton's theory was true. Einstein showed that Newton's theory may not have been the right explanation of the phenomena and was at best an approximation to truth. Newton's theory was a hypothesis whose truth is problematic.

Kant had said that our intellect does not draw its laws from nature but imposes them upon nature. But Popper reformulates this and says that our intellect does not draw its laws from nature but tries with varying degrees of success to impose upon nature laws which it freely invents. Kant was naïve to believe that Newton's laws were successfully imposed upon nature by us and that we were bound to interpret nature by means of these laws. So, Kant concluded that they must be true a priori. But Einstein has showed us that his interpretations were far superior to Newton's. We should not impose one particular interpretation upon nature and believe that this will be true for all times to come. A theory which has a greater explanatory power is certainly a better theory.

Popper says that theories are ultimately creations of our own mind. We should subject our theories to critical testing. The endeavour should be not to prove or verify some theory but to find out instances where we can falsify or refute them. Popper's most fundamental contribution is that we can never conclusively establish the truth of any general statement or any scientific law or theory because it is logically impossible. It was for this reason that he was opposed to Logical Positivism. He was also opposed to any quest for certainty as has been the case from Descartes to Russell. We can never know the truth of any scientific knowledge since every hypothesis remains fallible.

Popper's views had also implications for the social sciences. Any political or social policy is like an empirical prescription which says that if we want to achieve X then we must do A. But such a hypothesis can never be proved to be correct. Instead the more rational course of action for policymakers would be to subject any such hypothesis to critical examination before committing resources to it. Therefore, it is imperative that any society that claims to be open should allow critical discussion on the consequences of policies.

The fundamental idea of Popper is that it is easy to be wrong but impossible to be certain that we are right. Popper believed that the whole process of arriving at a scientific hypothesis is based on induction. But induction itself is often based on the psychological processes of the scientist himself. It is well documented in history that scientists have often arrived at theories even in their dreams. The well-known case of the discovery of the structure of benzene by Friedrich August Kekule goes to show that most theories are often arrived at not through experimental observations but by modification of some existing theory. The very process of discovery of some new scientific theory involves an element of intuition. Any observation or experiment that any scientist embarks upon is always based on some pre-existing idea or theory. Popper says that it is a fundamental flaw of the empirical tradition to believe that observations lead to theory. We never start with pure observations. The observations are always aimed at refuting some existing theory. And ultimately theories are only products of minds.

What Is Not Science

Popper denies the traditional inductive view that science arrives at statements that have the maximum degree of probability. A statement like 'it will rain' cannot be proved false because the informative content in the statement is actually minimal. But if we modify our statement to restrict the time span by stating 'it will rain within the next month' then it is a more informative statement and can also be falsified. Therefore, a more informative statement can be falsified. Those statements which are falsifiable also can be tested. Scientists often take enormous effort to prove that their theory is correct. But Popper believes that the true test of scientific theory should be its amenability to falsification. A theory is only preferable if it has a higher informative content.

All empirical statements have some truth content. Let us say that today is actually Sunday. Now, if



Arthur Eddington



Alfred Adler

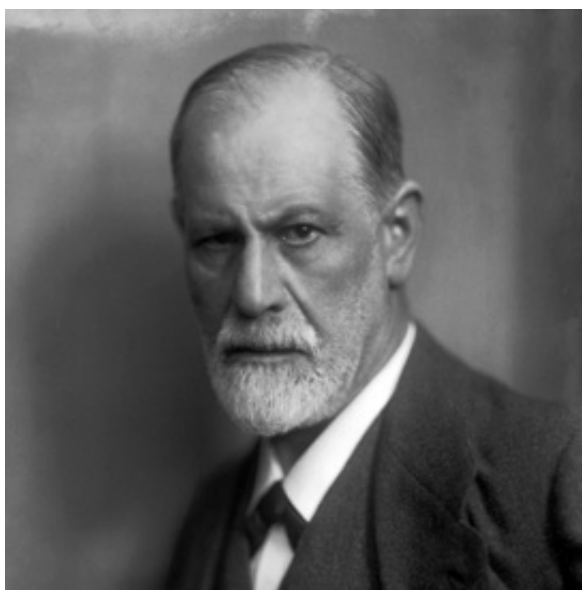
we make a statement 'Today is Monday', then it is false. But a moment's reflection will also tell us that today is not Tuesday, Wednesday etc. which are all true statements. Therefore, every false statement has infinite number of true consequences. Popper says that the criterion of demarcation between science and non-science is falsifiability. If all possible states of affairs can fit a theory then it can neither be true nor false. If it is testable then only is it scientific.

Einstein had said that if light is attracted by a heavy body, like the sun for example, then its path will be deflected by gravitational pull. Arthur Eddington tested Einstein's claim in 1919 in Africa and found that Einstein's observation was correct. It is possible that actual observation might have refuted Einstein. But when we consider the theories of psychoanalysts like Freud and Adler we may find that all situations in life could be explained through either repression or inferiority complex. So, they explained everything and no observation could falsify them. The same is true of Marxism, which happened to have an explanation for

every possible situation.

Logical Positivists believed that statements that were tautologies were true and statements that could not be empirically verifiable were meaningless. The verification principle of logical positivists pronounced all metaphysics meaningless. But Popper believed that if only statements which can be verified are held to be meaningful then any debate on the concept of meaning must contain meaningless statements. Let us take a statement like 'God exists'. The logical positivists would say that such a statement is meaningless since it is not empirically verifiable. But Popper's view would be that such a statement could be true but since this statement cannot be falsified it is not a scientific statement. Popper was against the linguistic analysis of Wittgenstein who believed that problems of philosophy are only problems of meanings of words.

In his book *Conjectures and Refutations* (1963) Popper said that the only way to expand human knowledge is through a process of



Sigmund Freud

6 feedback criticism. We cannot hope to expand our knowledge through observations and experiments. They can only play a role like critical arguments if they are used to test, challenge and refute theories. We must subject any such theory to critical examination by means of falsification. If we come up with any theory or any problem then we should submit the same to tests of critical discussion, observation and experiment. All these will constitute possible refutations of a theory. Popper claimed that it was the pre-Socratic philosophers who embarked on this tradition of critical interrogation as a means of expanding human knowledge. All knowledge before them was merely handed down from some authority or the other. In primitive societies dissent was not permitted and so any society's core body of knowledge remained static. The pre-Socratic philosophers of Greece institutionalized the method of criticism. They all engaged in critical discussion and debate to produce a better argument or theory. According to Popper this was the historical beginning of rationality and scientific method.

Open Society

Popper regarded living as a project of problem-solving. Any process of problem-solving requires critical examination and elimination

of error. Therefore, any society which claims to be open must allow different viewpoints and criticism of policies.

Policies are often based on some hypotheses which need to be tested before they are implemented. It is of utmost importance that before any resources, time or human labour is committed to any policy proposal, it should be comprehensively debated so that later faulty consequences do not waste precious resources. Every effort should be made to critically point out instances where such policies could be falsified.

Popper believes that true democracy should mean a society which accepts its own criticisms. A government by majority often leads to the 'paradox of democracy'. The majority may vote for a party that does not believe in free institutions. Popper also refers to the 'paradox of tolerance'. Any society that extends unlimited tolerance may itself be destroyed. One has to watch out for enemies of tolerance. He also refers to the 'paradox of freedom'. If all restraints on freedom are removed then it may lead to the strong enslaving the weak. Complete freedom may actually bring about the end of freedom. Popper is against any policy of unlimited economic freedom since this may lead to exploitation of the poor. He was in favour of a planned economic intervention by the state. He also talks about the 'paradox of sovereignty'.

Who should exercise ultimate power in a society? If a wise man is made the ruler he may think that rather than he himself, the morally good should be the ruler. If a morally good person gets to be the ruler he may think that only a saint can rule.

Popper says that instead of thinking who should rule we should be focusing on how we can minimize such ruling. The best society is the one that gives maximum qualified freedom to its members.

*‘Consulting others ensures no disappointment’
by the Iraqi artist Mohamed Mustafa Kamal*



David Solomon on Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling

Notes of the Wednesday Meeting 20th December 2017

PAUL COCKBURN

We were pleased to welcome David Solomon from London to the Albion Beatnik Bookshop. David gave a talk on Kierkegaard's 'Fear and Trembling'. Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was Danish and wrote of there being three stages of life: the aesthetic, dealing just with immediate concerns, the moral/ethical, and the religious.

In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard considers the Biblical story of Abraham and his attempt to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham, according to the Bible, has been told by God that his son Isaac will be the father of a great nation, through whom the whole world will be blessed. However, God then tells him to sacrifice his son on Mount Moriah. He obeys in faith and journeys with his son to the mountain, saying nothing to Isaac except 'God will provide a sacrifice' when questioned by Isaac. Abraham is a Knight of Faith: he continues to believe

Isaac will be the father of a great nation, but he still intends to sacrifice Isaac as God has instructed him to do, right up to the point where he raises the knife to kill his son. An angel then appears to point out to him a ram caught in a thicket, and Abraham then releases his son and sacrifices the ram. We looked at the painting by Caravaggio which shows this dramatic moment.

Kierkegaard thinks the story shows that Abraham had true faith, the belief in what seems impossible, a teleological suspension of the ethical. To Kierkegaard, Abraham is obeying a call from the Infinite to perform what seems an absurd act. He is being tested by God. He 'leaps into the infinite' and then returns so to speak to the normal world. In modern times however, we would consider Abraham to be contemplating murder while the balance of his mind was disturbed. Is



Left-Right:
Fred Cousins,
Paul Cockburn,
Phil Walden
and David Solomon

Abraham acting ‘below’ the ethical or ‘above’ it? (It was pointed out that Abraham lived before Moses and the Ten Commandments).

In the Biblical story we are not privy to Abraham’s thoughts and emotions, but it seems clear that Kierkegaard’s state of mind when he wrote *Fear and Trembling* was affected by his engagement to marry his sweetheart Regine, which she eventually broke off.

Abraham’s faith is personal, different from that of a Greek hero such as Agamemnon who sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia in order that winds would be created to blow his fleet of ships to Troy. Kierkegaard thinks that Agamemnon was trying to help the Greeks in a public way, he is seeking a universal good. Abraham’s struggle was private, subjective.

In our discussion, there was speculation that Abraham thought Isaac could be resurrected, the story prefigures Christ’s death on the cross and his resurrection. Abraham could have been conflicted mentally rather than having no doubts – this was surely the mental state of Kierkegaard as he was faced with the problem of his engagement. These individual internal struggles which Abraham does not speak of (perhaps he cannot communicate them to other people in a meaningful way) could show that somehow the individual does not really fit into the ‘universal’. Perhaps also there is a place for the irrational in our lives – most lives as they are lived are not rational, we have to respond to events that are unexpected and catch us unawares. We might be able to rationalize what happens after the event, but that does not help us deal with them as we live always in the present moment. Kierkegaard puts passion before reason.

It is strange that Kierkegaard as the ‘father’ of existentialism was so religious, as later existential philosophers such as Sartre were atheists. However, by concentrating and valuing the subjective Kierkegaard examined



David Solomon at The Wednesday meeting

the inner mental life of man, rather than the objective ‘outer’ world of man. He tries to show that in considering life reason is not enough, and for him the extra that is required is religious sensibility, commitment and passion.

Phil Walden adds a Hegelian note:

The Wednesday group was pleased to have hosted David Solomon on December the twentieth. Without taking sides, David accurately laid out Kierkegaard’s most important objections to Hegel. According to Kierkegaard, Hegel is wrong to think that the problems of the world can be solved by reflection. Instead, they have to be confronted with passion. Also, Kierkegaard thinks that mediation is a chimera.

However, I think that Hegel is correct to hold that one needs a theory of history in order to be able to make sense of history. A Kierkegaardian response might be that we aren’t supposed to make sense of history. Rather we are supposed to show faith in God. But it is in my view crucial to recognize that Hegel doesn’t reject faith. Instead Hegel thinks that we must first exhaust the resources of reason before we turn to faith. This explains why Hegel writes so much about the development of consciousness and logic through history, whilst also writing a great deal defending aspects of Christianity.

Verse-Thinking: a monorhyme



CHRIS NORRIS

Ideas cannot be Given but in their Minutely Appropriate Words

William Blake

Perhaps one consequence of serious attention to the phenomenon of verse thinking might even be that, in certain circumstances, ideas cannot be given but in their minutely appropriate tunes.

Simon Jarvis, 'Bedlam or Parnassus: the verse idea'

**What's meant and what you mean to mean are two
Quite different things, so if by chance they do
For once match up, it's hardly down to you.
Think how your simplest speech-acts go askew,
End up way off the mark, or rendezvous
With meanings that arrive out of the blue
And sayings whose unheralded debut
Can knock you sideways. Then they'll often cue
Some phrase-linked line of thought that carries
through
To some untried or novel point of view
On whatsoever theme it was first drew
You off on this adventure.**

Why eschew

**The thought that maybe here's our biggest clue
To how a poem works, that 'if the shoe
Fits, wear it!' rhyme-wise, since the poet who
Allows rhyme's subtle agency to slew**



**Intent at times is freed up to pursue
The language-trail where lucky finds accrue
Like four-leaf clovers. Letting rhyme subdue
The plain-sense drive is how the poet-crew
Have always managed to dissolve the glue
That stops our word-hoard burgeoning anew
Each time we speak or write. If they rough-hew
It somewhat, that's because the prose taboo
On errant tropes here joins the lengthy queue
Of poet-proven fallacies that strew
Our language-path. Bright meaning-swerves in lieu
Of dull normality: the passe-partout
That frees us from the human language-zoo
And shows how every sense-transforming coup
Of poet-speech invites us to construe
Reality afresh and bid adieu
To custom-staled routine.**

**Long overdue,
That tonic, though long deemed a witches' brew
By those for whom all efforts to unscrew
The hold-down bolts of sense are ways to woo
Language-catastrophe. That bugaboo
Is every poet's dream: the i.o.u.
That's not called in so long as they imbue
Their words with the poetic revenue
Of language unrestrained where impromptu
Wordplay and rhyme provide one of the few
Real freedoms left this side of Xanadu.**



Blake

Bookshops

Thornton's Bookshop:

The business has survived another thirty-five years

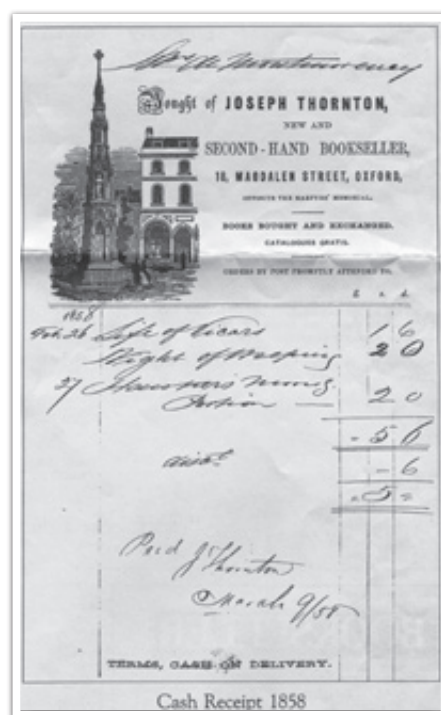
Last week we published part one of this article which gave an account of the first phase of J (Joseph) Thornton & Son, the Broad street bookshop and covered a century and a half of the shop's life. This was followed by the new ownership of Scharlie and Willem (Wim) Meeuws in the early 1980-ies. The article below follows the story of the shop under their management.

Part 2

RAHIM HASSAN

Thornton's, as I had said in part one of this article, was at one time the oldest bookshop in Oxford, older than Blackwell's. It was in the hands of the Thornton family (Joseph Thornton and Son) for a century and a half (1835-1983). There was a crisis at the end of their reign and the shop was threatened with closure, but Scharlie and Wim Meeuws moved in and saved it. Parker's bookshop, also in Broad street and owned by Blackwell's, used to be the oldest till the end of the 1970s.

Wim started his life in bookselling after doing his Dutch national service in a tank regiment during the years 1959 - 1961. He began his bookselling career in The Hague in 1961. He worked for the then largest bookshop in Holland, Martinus Nijhoff of The Hague. At the time the last Nijhoff, Wouter Nijhoff. (1928-1965), was still in charge. Wim was an avid reader and had intended to study Dutch and German, so a large bookshop was the right place to earn the money for his studies. He soon gave up the idea of studying and instead decided to make bookselling his career. He accepted a job in a Hamburg bookshop and left The Hague in October 1962 before coming to Oxford in June 1964. There he joined Parker's Bookshop (now Blackwell's art shop) also in Broad street in their foreign department. He already had a contract with Parker's before leaving Hamburg. **The Wednesday** has a copy of the letter. At the time Blackwell's were part-owners of Parker's. The remaining shares were owned by the Thomas and Powell families. Tony Thomas became one of the three directors after his father's retirement. Then Blackwell's, having owned 49 % of the shares since the end of the 1930s, took over completely. Tony continued to work for Blackwell's, but offended Richard Blackwell and was dismissed. In



Cash receipt when still on site of the Randolph hotel 1858

the second half of the seventies, Parker's moved to Nottingham and became a supplier of school books and then disappeared. Wim's customers, when he was working at Parkers, included Sir Isaiah Berlin, Cecil Day Lewis, Iris Murdoch and J R Tolkien, who in those days was not all that famous yet. Much later Thornton's stocked Tolkien's books in 40 languages. There always was a special display of Tolkien books and the bookshop mounted a large book exhibition at the 1992 centenary conference in Keble college.

Holdan Books

In 1966 Wim started his own business Holdan Books, a mail order bookshop, in his flat in Oxford. His future wife, Scharlie, came to work in Blackwell's



Cellar in Friar's Entry 1967 Wim and Scharlie Meeuws with baby Daniel at Holdan Books in 1975



French department in 1968. Both she and Wim are fluent in several languages. They met in Oxford in 1968, at an international literary event. Scharlie, a 4th generation bookseller herself, is the great granddaughter of Johanne Alt, who in 1868 founded what was to become one of Germany's well-known medical bookshops. They married in August 1969.

In 1967 Wim had moved the business to a basement in Friars Entry (now Debenhams) and from 1968 till 1974 occupied larger premises in Headington with his Danish partner Villy Sørensen. In 1974 Holdan Books moved to North Parade Avenue near Park Town. It was named Holdan Books to combine the names of both partners' countries of origin: 'Hol' for Holland and 'dan' for Denmark. The shop's speciality was foreign languages especially covering Russian and other Slavic languages, but also French and German. According to Antony Wood of the *Oxford Mail* (1975) Wim Meeuws founded Holdan Books Ltd. together with Villy Sørensen in 1966. Sir Basil Blackwell visited Holdan Books a few times when it was in North Parade Avenue. His son Richard once told Wim that he would not make it on his own 'so many have tried' he said. 'You'll break your neck' was his not so kind remark in the presence of his son Miles

In 1969, Scharlie and Wim left for Germany and left the business with their partner. They moved to Frankfurt to revive the family business Johannes Alt, which had celebrated its centenary a year earlier.

This Bookshop flourished again under their management but medical books were not their favourite, they preferred the humanities. Also, Mr. Sørensen returned to Denmark to set up a bookshop there. From Frankfurt they also supplied libraries and academic institutions in Britain

and elsewhere. They landed the government contract to supply all German third-world programs with English-language books and periodicals via Holdan Books in Oxford.

One of the customers of the Frankfurt bookshop was a renowned professor of internal medicine. The professor's son, a clock maker, became one of the Baader-Meinhof gang. He turned out to be the Baader-Meinhof gang's bomb-maker, Dierk Hoff.

They sold the German bookshop in 1974 and returned to Oxford and soon moved Holdan Books from Headington to North Parade, where again one would find piles of books in every room, even stacked up the staircase.

Thornton's

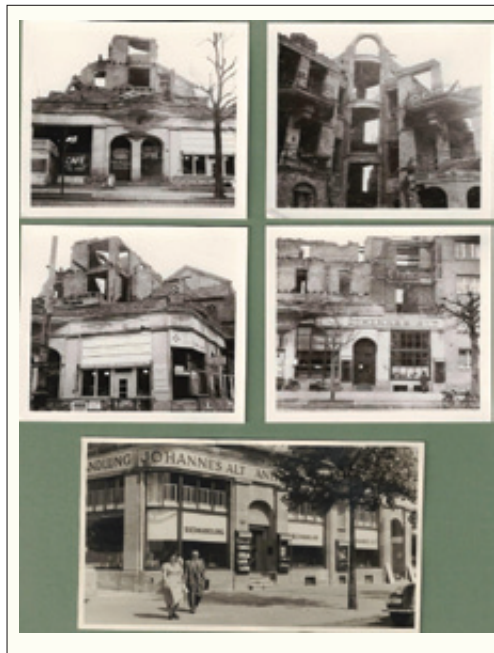
Between 1974 and 1983, Holdan Books was located in North Parade Avenue near Park Town. But in January 1983, Wim received a call from Gerald Aylmer, master of St. Peter's College asking him if he could 'save' Thornton's for the University. Scharlie and Wim accepted the challenge and after a serious talk with the bank took over Thornton's merging it with Holdan Books. For the next 19 years, from 1983 till the end of December 2002, they ran Thornton's from the premises in Broad Street and continued with this from their home in Faringdon selling by mail order and internet. They were so kind and hospitable to me when I visited them at their home in Faringdon to get information for this article

Wim constantly built up contacts with Russia especially and bought books from Russian university and other Eastern European libraries on an exchange basis, exchanging British publications for classical literature

Bookshops



Wim Meeuws 1985 in Broad street top floor office at Thornton's



Johannes Alt bookshop destroyed in 1944 in air raid

and rare books up to 1989 when the Berlin wall came down. He was also known as a publisher mostly in the field of Slavic studies, but also published 2 books on Plastic Surgery and various poetry collections (amongst them Elizabeth Jennings' *An Oxford Cycle* in 1987). He dealt in new and antiquarian books in most European languages, Slavic studies, classical, theological, Ancient Near Eastern studies to mention just a few and he reached customers all across the globe

Wim Meeuws also told me that in 1988 he and Scharlie opened a branch in Leiden, the Netherlands. It did not succeed and they closed it down a year later.

Scharlie and Wim had many loyal assistants. One of them was Clive Randall, who had started with John (Jack) Thornton 10 years before that. They kept him on and made him their manager and buyer. In January 2003 the business moved with five members of staff to the Milton Trading Estate (near Didcot) for 18 months. In the autumn of 2004, four of them were made redundant. Clive stayed on and with Wim he converted his garage in Cowley into a warehouse and despatch for the books till the end of 2011.

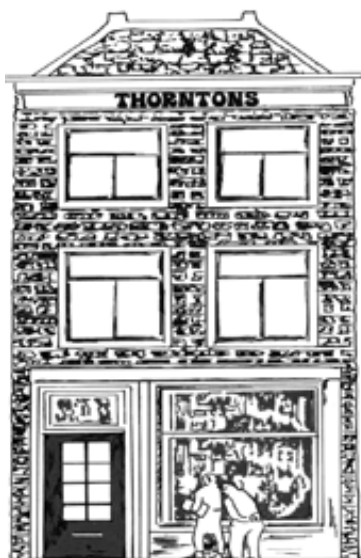
This ensured that Thornton's remained Oxford-based until 2011. From 2004 to 2011 Clive Randall was in charge of despatches from his home in Cowley and



A scene from Brideshead Revisited



Thornton's Bookshop leaflet published by Mr. and Mrs. Meeuws



Thornton's Leiden 1988-89



Fiedler's chair with his initials engraved on the back



Professor Fiedler in his chair

conducted the business by post. Scharlie and Wim, who were living on Boars Hill until 2007, moved to Faringdon that year and have kept the business running to this day. The Broad street premises are owned by the City Council and in 2002 the lease was passed on to their neighbour, the Buttery, café and hotel. The rare book room is now an en-suite bedroom

Famous personalities

Wim bought books and libraries from many famous scholars. To mention just a few: Jean Seznec, Professor of French at Oxford, Hermann Georg Fiedler, Professor of German literature also at Oxford. Fiedler had a chair in Oxford (his former students gave him a chair when he was appointed at Oxford). The desk is now in a Birmingham museum, the chair in the Taylorian Institute. The Iris Murdoch collection, partly obtained from Iris herself, is now in McMaster's University library, Canada.

Films

Several Films were shot in or around the shop. Most famous are: *Brideshead Revisited*, *The Life of Robert Frost* and, of course a scene in the last episode of the Inspector Morse films 'The remorseful day' Photographs of the day the scene was filmed can be found on the Thornton website.

'Not much active bookselling is going on these days after 56 years in the profession' Wim said. 'But I still get offers of libraries and smaller collections and I then help to find colleagues in the trade.' We now prefer to spend time in our garden and won the 2017 small gardens competition in Faringdon.

I am indebted to Wim and Scharlie Meeuws for their help with this article. In particular, I am grateful for their hospitality when I visited them at their home and for sharing the information and photos.

The Wednesday

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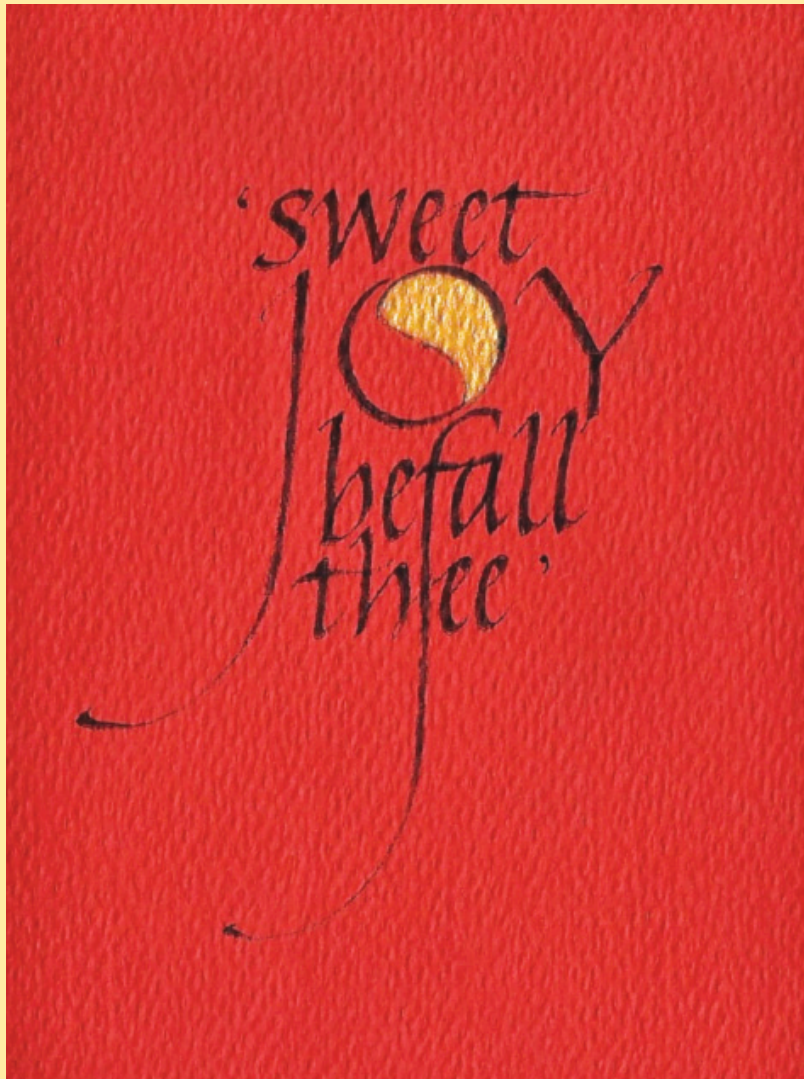
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The Wednesday

wishes all its readers a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year



(Original art work by Barbara Vellacott. Words from *Infant Joy*, by William Blake.)