

The Wednesday



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group at Albion Beatnik - Oxford

Editorial

Mysticism and the Ascetic Ideal

Nietzsche identified and described the Ascetic Ideal. It is when life-instincts are turned against life itself. This Ideal was generalised to art, as in art for art's sake, knowledge in all its forms, science, religion, philosophy, as in the search for truth and pessimism of the Schopenhauerian type. What all these types share is the neglect of life as in its lived experience. Life, for Nietzsche, means the activation of all the human being's potential. The human being is not only an artist but could be a scientist as well, a Socrates who plays music, always creative, socially active and productive.

Nietzsche considered the Ascetic Ideal to be a sign and cause of nihilism and decadence. He was committed to countering this Ideal. For him, life (that is the natural and the human worlds, and the human for him is part of nature itself) is a process of continuous creativity and always on the move. This creativity may look brutal and cruel but life goes on. He also applied this to the self. The self for him is not a given unit but a continuous struggle of drives and instincts to gain mastery. In the process of interpretation, it becomes a field of rival views that are continuously overtaking each other, or in Hegelian language, sublation – '*Aufhebung*' – that applies both to the self and the text.

Nietzsche, in my view, is right about this in its generality but is he right about the details? I am not sure. I found remarkable exceptions to what he calls the Ascetic Ideal in a very surprising field – mysticism. One might expect Nietzsche's attack to be directed mainly against the ascetics for their strict regimes, isolation and their disregard for the body. But I came across two mystics in particular who are on the side of Nietzsche and hence they are safe from his attack, unless he becomes dogmatic and rejects both just for being mystics. The two mystics I have in mind are Ibn Arabi (12 – 13th Centuries) and Abdul-Ghani al-Nabulusi (17th Century). The latter is a follower of the former and commentator on his thought.

The former, Ibn Arabi, inhabited, theoretically, a creative universe with continuous begetting and came very close to discovering a Hegelian Dialectic with his logic of Threeness. His favourite metaphors are marriage, love-making and begetting. For example, he says he had a vision or a dream in which he was shown all the stars and he made love to them all; he was shown all the letters of the alphabet and he also made love to them all. I take it that this activity is one of mastery of the sciences, the physical universe (maybe alchemy), and the spiritual world of thought, writings and poetry. He did excel in all of these.

His universe is also one of continuous movement, and the whole creation comes out of this movement, or what he called Journeying *safar*, starting with the Divine Names (or in Platonic terms the *Archetypes*) being given the opportunity to travel forward to manifest their powers, creating in effect all that there is and all that is potential. The Holy Books and the prophets are always journeying. The mystic himself is journeying in the universe, having ascension or *Mi'raj*, only to discover that the journey is within himself. Ibn Arabi also talked about the Perfect Man, a concept that we may come back to it to compare its similarities to and differences from Nietzsche's Overman.

The follower, Abdul-Ghani al-Nabulusi is an amazing character, unusual when compared with our usual understanding of a mystic. He is a *Man with all Qualities* (to adapt a title from Robert Musil's novel *The Man without Qualities*). He was deeply immersed in life and enjoyed all that it could offer, especially natural beauty, good friends, comfort and entertainments, besides being a poet, a mystic and a philosopher.

These two examples seem to counter Nietzsche's generalisation of the Ascetic Ideal but they also work on the side of Nietzsche's view. What they all shared is an interest in life, creativity and continuous overcoming.

The Editor

Kierkegaard and Subjectivity: Fear from Freedom and the Leap of Faith

Kierkegaard is a philosopher of a considerable influence, especially on existential thought. He is also interesting for being a religious philosopher in an increasingly secular, materialist age. The article below situates his thought in the Post-Kantian tradition and explores the main themes of his philosophy.



Kierkegaard

RANJINI GHOSH

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard has been considered as the father of existentialism. His views on the nature of subjective truth and the meaning of existence and the centrality of the individual and the individual's relation to God have been influential.

Kant

In order to understand the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard, we have to first comprehend ideas on religion and morality given by Kant and Hegel. This is because he significantly differed from both of them in his views on God and ethics.

Kant appreciated the Newtonian scientific view of understanding the physical world and the laws given by them. Kant was concerned whether in order to understand reality one should depend only on the empirical methods propounded by the science of his time, or whether it was possible to have a higher insight into reality on the basis of ideas and reason that were not subject to empirical constraints. Kant demonstrated that to understand reality one needs both reason and sensory

experience. He explained that it is not possible to understand reality beyond the boundaries of our senses. He drew a distinction between the empirical world of phenomena and a noumenal world of things-in-themselves which could not be understood through experience. He therefore concluded that theological dogmas could explain a reality which is beyond our senses. At the same time, he also pointed out that on this very logic such dogmas could also not be falsified.

Kant also insisted that human beings are not just acting out of natural causality but are also moral agents capable of rational choice. That is, we are not merely parts of the empirical order of nature subject to causal laws but there is a part in us where we are capable of reason and autonomy of action. He was emphatic in his view that purely practical reason gives us notions of freedom and a belief in the existence of God.

Hegel

In the Hegelian view of the world, Nature has a completely independent existence apart from

ourselves. Other human beings are also treated as separate and external to us. This creates problems in the sense that people often feel a sense of estrangement or alienation from their own societies and other human beings because they are external to them. In such a case, the individual becomes isolated and his actions are then based on his own sense of judgement and beliefs. In this process contradictions develop between individuals and societies. But how can such conflicts be overcome? Hegel said that it is the 'Absolute Spirit' or Geist which is a process of the universe thought which individuals become part of a whole. This spirit manifests itself in the consciousness of human beings. This manifestation can be seen in the emergence of various stages of history, giving rise to a type of society where the objective interests of the state match those of the individual. Therefore, the external world is no longer opposed to the individual as something outside himself but permeates human consciousness. Human thought reaches a stage of absolute knowledge. Hegel said that traditional theology projected the notion of God as something external to and higher than human beings. This produces a state of 'unhappy consciousness' because it is something which human beings could strive for outside of themselves but could never hope to achieve.

Modes Of Existence

Kierkegaard distinguished three basic spheres of existence: the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious. Someone who lives aesthetically is said to be not in control of either himself or his situation. He lives for the moment and is not committed to anything permanent but only seeks immediate gratification of his senses. His life lacks stability and focus and there is no continuity. His approach to the world is not active but passive in that his will is dependent upon external conditions. He does not seek to give a coherent pattern to his life. The ethical mode of life in contrast is one where the individual understands his own nature and takes responsibility for himself. This mode involves acceptance of socially recognized duties and responsibilities. The ethical world is typified by the state of marriage. To enter into marriage



Kant

is to commit oneself to duties and obligations. In this sphere of life, the choice between good and evil acquires significance.

Leap Of Faith

Kierkegaard shows that faith lies beyond the province of ethics. He illustrates the Biblical story of Abraham. He calls Abraham the *Knight of Faith*. Abraham is asked by God to kill his son Isaac and offer him as a sacrifice. He agrees to do so and at the precise moment of drawing his knife he is stopped from killing his son because a ram is given to him instead. The story of Abraham is a kind of spiritual trial. Through this story Kierkegaard shows the kind of choice which confronted Abraham. Killing a son was ethically unacceptable but it was something higher that prompted Abraham to accept the direction of God.

Kierkegaard compares the moral dilemma of Abraham with that of the tragic hero Agamemnon who decided to sacrifice his daughter (Iphigenia) for the sake of the state. Agamemnon agrees to do so because he is doing something to serve a higher ethical purpose that is in the interest of the universal. The ethical for him is the 'telos' or goal but for Abraham the telos is something which

is even higher where he 'suspends the ethical'. He places himself in an absolute relation to the absolute. His action can therefore be justified only in context of this unique relation which he enters into with God.

Kierkegaard has been criticized for his religious justification of the suspension of the ethical as amounting to a kind of moral nihilism. Abraham was acting on the will of God and therefore such action was higher than any ethical considerations we are accustomed to. According to Hegel any behaviour is moral when it contributes to the maintenance of society. Individual actions lack moral worth when they cannot be linked to the wellbeing of society as a whole. So, there is an ethical relation between the individual and the society and the terminology used by Hegel and Kierkegaard is that between 'particular' and 'universal'. One can act contrary to one's obligation as a father, husband, mother or son if such action can be justified to be for the benefit of the universal. Abraham was prepared to kill his own son even though he was doing nothing for the universal, although the irony is that Isaac his son was to be the progenitor of the future human race or the 'universal'. Therefore, his action has to be justified on something higher than the ethical. The ethical cannot be the goal or telos but was subservient to some other goal or purpose. There has to be a teleological suspension of the ethical. It is therefore a faith in God which allows us to do acts which may not be ethical from the point of view of the universal. And such acts which would appear patently absurd can only be justified by pure belief in God or what Kierkegaard calls a 'leap of faith'.

4 Kierkegaard says that faith is a paradox in that a single individual as the particular is higher than the universal. The relation between the individual and the absolute cannot be mediated by anyone because mediation can only occur through the universal. Abraham acts on the strength of the absurd for it is precisely absurd that as a single individual he is higher than the universal. The tragic hero Agamemnon stays within the ethical

since for him the ethical is the telos but Abraham as the Knight of Faith oversteps the ethical altogether since he has a higher telos outside it. He agrees to kill his son because God demands proof of his faith.

The tragic hero does not enter into a private relationship with God since the ethical or the universal is divine for him. But not so for Abraham who exists as the particular in opposition to the universal. How does he so exist? He had faith, and this is the paradox. Hence Abraham's story involves a teleological suspension of the ethical where he as a single individual becomes higher than the universal. In Hegelian philosophy the outer or the external is higher than the inner. But faith presents us with a contrary that interiority is higher to exteriority. There is an absolute duty of human beings to God and such relationship cannot be mediated.

Truth

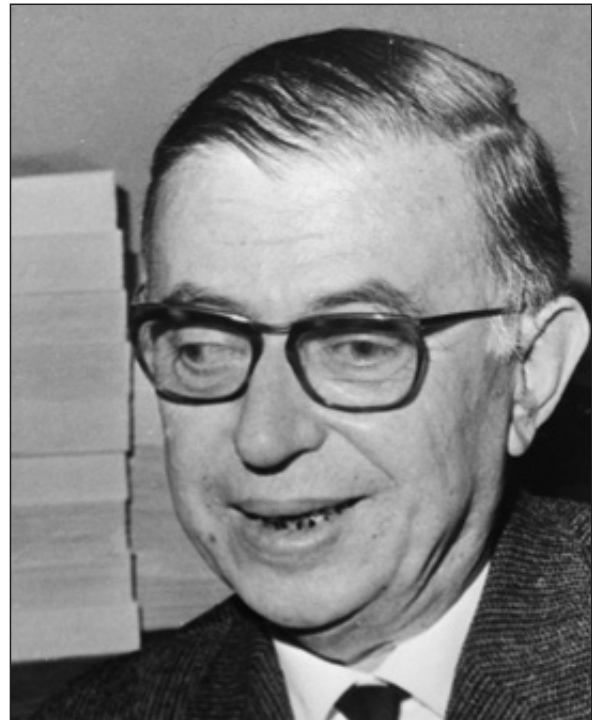
Kierkegaard mainly concerns himself with how religious truth can be learnt. He refers to the 'doctrine of recollection' given by Plato. If truth is already known then we cannot seek it, but on the other hand if it is not known then how will we recognize it as the truth when we encounter it? Kierkegaard said 'the truth is not introduced into the individual from without but was within him'. The Platonic conception of knowledge was based on the notion of recollection that some basic knowledge was latent within us and that it was the job of a teacher to activate this dormant knowledge. The other view is that the individual is not in possession of any such truths and that such knowledge is external to him. Since such truth is external or outside of him, it will have to be brought to the individual who will have to change himself inwardly of corruption and vice so as to be able to recognize the truth. The teacher who can bring such truth to the learner cannot be another human being but only God. But such truth should not be presented to the individual in a manner which overawes him into submission and leaves him with no freedom of choice. The manner of communication of these truths has to

be on a one-to-one level between equals. So, if truths are to come from God, then God has to appear in human form to humans. And herein lies the 'Absolute Paradox' in that the eternal has to enter the sphere of the temporal which goes contrary to any reason. So, faith and reason are in conflict and only one of them can survive. This is because reason will consider this as absurd. In faith the individual takes a leap with the help of the teacher. Hence there is the paradox of the incarnation of God in human form and that of faith. As Kierkegaard says, 'Faith is itself a miracle and all that holds true of the Paradox also holds true of Faith.'

Subjectivity

Kierkegaard says that it is subjectivity that Christianity is concerned with, and that it is only in subjectivity that its truth exists. Objectively Christianity has absolutely no existence. He maintains that there are some truths that cannot be understood in an objective or detached manner. There is a difference between the way we understand things from the outside as uninvolved spectators and when we try to comprehend something from within. What he is trying to say is that we cannot understand everything from pure observation alone but should practically engage ourselves to understand the inner meaning. This perspective of Kierkegaard has been described in later existentialism as the principle of authenticity.

Sartre emphasizes that the subjectivity of the individual is important for understanding choice, responsibility and freedom. For Kierkegaard subjectivity also means 'inwardness' or a commitment of an individual to his own cause. Religious faith requires commitment to a particular mode of existence or living, a passionate engagement of the whole personality and not just objective knowledge of certain tenets. In his view Christianity is inherently paradoxical and contrary to human reason. The belief in the existence of God involves objective uncertainty in that one does not have any rational proof of the same. For Kierkegaard, faith is the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual's



Sartre

inwardness and the objective uncertainty. He says that subjectivity is truth. He says when the question of truth is raised subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively to the nature of the individual's relationship. If the mode of this relationship is in the truth, the individual is in the truth even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true. In explaining this he compares the situation of a man who has a true conception of God but prays to him in a false spirit. On the other hand, there is a man who prays to an idol but he has the entire passion of the infinite. It is on the side of this man that most truth is to be found. He says 'the one prays in truth to God, though he worships an idol; the other prays falsely to the true God and hence worships in fact an idol'. So, believing subjectively in truth refers to a manner in which the belief is subscribed to.

Freedom And The Self

Hegel had stated that man's relation with religion involves an 'unhappy consciousness'. Man is dual natured in that he possesses an unchanging inner essence while at the same time he is a particular located within the universal. His inner world is therefore often in conflict with the external world



Abraham's sacrifice

outside of him. Reconciliation between the two is only possible when the human mind and its consciousness recognise the universal spirit of which he becomes a part.

Kierkegaard portrays human beings as a synthesis of the psychical and the physical. A human being is also a spirit and is able to transcend his natural traits and circumstances. Kierkegaard famously said that 'A person is not just a being but becoming'. What a person becomes depends on his own will and choice and we must therefore take our own responsibility. Every individual harbours an inner anxiety about his condition.

Hegel had thought that conflicts arising from the dual nature of human beings would disappear when human consciousness fuses into the spirit of the universal, that is, when the objective spirit of the universal matches the subjective spirit of the individual. But for Kierkegaard such conflicts are part of our existence. He talked of anxiety (*Angst*) which is part of the experience of living. Kierkegaard talks of the 'dizziness of freedom' that arises from our existential condition. He refers to the biblical story of Adam when he was forbidden to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge.



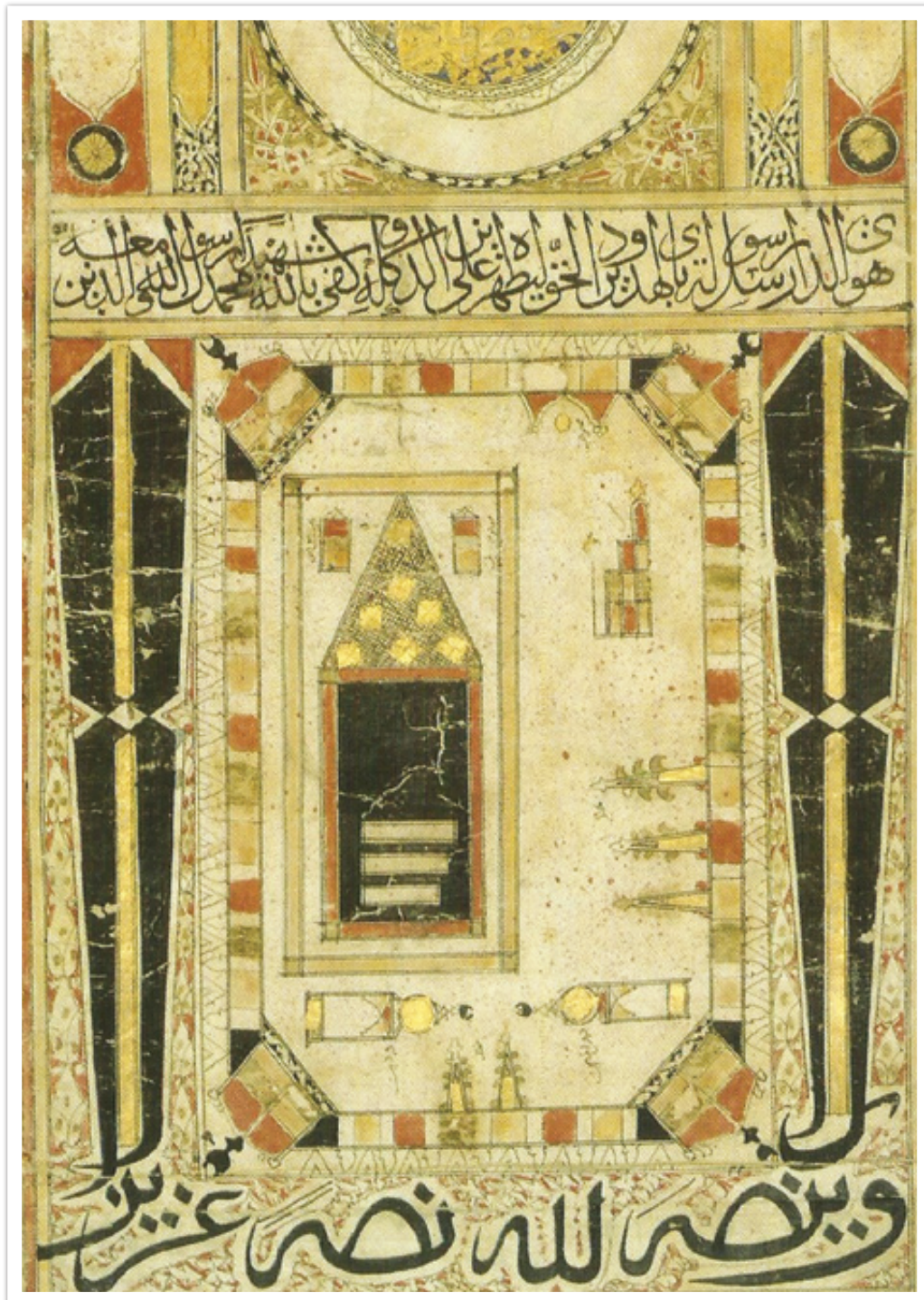
Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter Iphigenia

According to him the possibility of freedom first came to man from here and this brought the anxiety associated with it. The anxiety flows from freedom itself, the freedom to have to make a choice and take responsibilities that come with it and bear the consequences. He is concerned with the passions and anxieties of the individual man. This is why he has been called the first Existentialist. Philip Mairet says that Nietzsche's Superman and Kierkegaard's Knight of Faith are both conceptions of the transcendence of passion and intellectualism through the power of some purely inward integrity, though the one is an integrity of mastery and the other of obedience. (Mairet, Philip, 'Introduction' in *Existentialism and Humanism*, Methuen, 2013).

For Kierkegaard, as Mairet points out, individuals alone were real and the critical dilemmas of individual's life are not solved by intellectual exploration of laws of thinking about them. The reality of everyone's existence proceeds from the 'inwardness' of man and not from objectified knowledge. Truth is subjectivity. It was in this inward relationship of oneself to oneself, that is in this subjectivity, that one becomes aware of God and the relationship to Him.

Exhibitions

The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford is holding a major exhibition on the art of world religions under the title *Imagining the Divine*. The picture below is part of a long scroll (about meter and a half) made of several panels depicting a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1432/ 3 written in ink and gold. The writings in this part were taken from the Quran.



How Can We Learn From Modernism Now?

Is Modernism in art and literature at an end or is still a force to be reckoned with? The article below comments on a recent debate on this topic and suggests a fresh look.

DAVID CLOUGH

During the last three years Radio Three has started each January with themes related to the new directions classical music is supposed to be taking. My own awareness that major changes were occurring goes back to ten years ago. But because I am an older person I was playing catch up with what the academics were saying about it. I hadn't for example read Alex Ross's *The Rest is Noise* book, a rather US-biased in my view, till about 2011. I was still using a model of modernist music I had developed in the seventies, eighties and nineties. Some adjustments but also resistance and critique would become necessary. However, *The Rest is Noise* is almost an authoritative text for those promoting music these days.

Of course, not everybody is as interested in classical music or certain composers (or philosophers) as I am. But the question of cultural change goes much further than my personal playlist, if one wants to put it in that rather trendy way. Music, it is true, has had one of the biggest and most obvious shake-ups partly because most modernist scores have never really been popular. The ones I liked weren't the most extreme but even composers like Tippett or Ligeti who seemed in relative terms 'popular' or 'significant' up to the millennium have struggled since the mid noughties and even though Henze and Elliot Carter were still alive up to around 2012. Now they are all de-composing. Maxwell Davies joined them in 2016, leaving Just Birtwistle I suppose as the unrepentant public musical modernist.

On Radio Three's Free Thinking, last week, (Tuesday January 2) Roger Scruton was involved with others discussing this subject in literature and the visual arts. It did have the same British focus Melvin Bragg might also have given it. It was about Eliot and Pound, Woolf and Joyce and maybe Beckett in literary scope.

Scruton and some of the others thought modernism was perhaps a bigger crisis than the one we face now and it aimed so high not only did only a few understand its highest peaks, but also it was bound to be short-lived. Not much of the key literature postdates 1930. *Finnegan's Wake*, Scruton said was clearly a dead end. Maybe Imagism was.

Now for me Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf* novel was my simpler introduction to a complex subject. Hesse liked Bach, Mozart and Chopin – what he called old music. And what he didn't like wasn't Schoenberg (which both Adorno and Ricoeur incidentally said they did like) but the jazz bands in Otto Dix's paintings and Hesse's character got annoyed when his beloved Goethe had a bad portrait. But what were Hesse and his protagonist actually doing? They were hanging around Basle after his second marriage had flopped, he was approaching fifty and feeling pretty despondent as the accompanying *Krisis* poems also show. But though he perhaps ruthlessly critiques his German Burgher persona in the novel, does this really change his musical tastes? He was under Nietzsche's shadow to be sure, but unlike Milan Kundera he struggled to both laugh and forget. If Nietzsche wanted a dancing god and Tippett wanted Nietzsche's dancing star Hesse's s protagonist (Harry Haller) really struggled as I do myself to enjoy Strictly Come Dancing let alone take part.

Let's go back to the Scruton discussion if we can. What was happening to art and literature since the 1930s? According to the discussion, artists and authors were learning something from modernism but also returning to tradition, which was clearly Scruton's theme. Even Eliot stopped trying to outdo Pound as he did only once in the *Wasteland* it was said. If such a position was possible for novelists and poets in the fifties and sixties is the same thing happening now? Well no, not exactly. If one tries to write like a modernist now in



T.S. Eliot



Roger Scruton



Virginia Woolf

either art or literature what comes out is a fairly empty modernism 'lite' they said. And the neoclassical option as such was not really available either. But it is still hard to not deviate because I recognise many of themes in my own telling or narration of it. If modernism (as in Hesse's *Novel*) tried to preserve high culture against what Hesse calls 'the radio music of life' some of this finds an echo in Kierkegaard as well as Baudelaire. In Kierkegaard's *Present Age*, the author reacts badly to the Tivoli gardens as a Parisian invasion. This is the same Kierkegaard who had gone to Berlin to hear Schelling as a younger man. Also, the accounts of modernism I read often seemed to rest on Flaubert, Manet or Baudelaire in the 19th C but the musicals of Victor Hugo seemed to bring out a different strain of French literature, equivalent perhaps to what we might think of in Dickens.

But in modernism debates one also encounters themes like whether Ibsen is realist or a modernist; or looking at other French novelists like Zola (author of *Germinal*) that is supposed to be naturalist whereas Balzac is supposed as a realist whom Engels liked and who perhaps had salience here with Mrs Gaskell. Romanticism in France dates from an aristocrat called Chateaubriand. We had our romantic poets and writers, and the Germans had their even more arguably culturally influential poets, writers and idealist philosophers. What I find in our radio discussions is a rather narrower perspective. Even I haven't

included American, Italian or Russian voices here. If naturalism, realism and then modernism were some kind of temporal succession of cultural evolution that leads us to stadial discussions of what comes after modernism and of course such discussions have filled many books.

The consensus of the radio discussion was that we were in a kind of uncertain flux period now. If Scruton still felt art only made sense in light of concepts like history and tradition (and in my philosophical landscape Hegel and Ricoeur would probably agree with him) there were aspects of Kierkegaard 'the moment', 'passion', moral earnestness, leaps, which modernists particularly in theology wanted to theorise. Even critics like Adorno have been more Kierkegaardian as time goes on, which perhaps illuminates last week's discussion a little.

But the moods of modern art at present seem to me to leap in the dark at times and realise a 'begin again' mentality pretty radically. So, I wasn't sure that the modernists didn't have that much stronger sense of tradition to react against. Similarly, theorists of religion had more superstructure to rebel or innovate against in the 60s than they do now. It is hard to unpick the wisdom of one's earlier life completely, but as generations succeed each other what is being sedimented is of course continually changing. And most of it now is through new media.

Bookshops

One woman and her bookshop

Diana Burfield and Artemis

Diana Cressy Burfield (1928 - December 2011) was the dynamo during the 1960s behind Tavistock Publications. It was she who commissioned the first English translation of Foucault. Towards the end of her career, she opened a bookshop on the Cowley Road, Oxford (September 1980 - 1996). The following article is a personal take on Miss Burfield and the Artemis bookshop with additional material from her memoirs, the London Review of Books and her obituary in the Guardian:

Part 3

RAHIM HASSAN

I came to know Diana Burfield in the late 1980s. I used to have most Fridays off. I used to go to the mosque in Cowley for the Friday prayers, followed by a look at the new stock of books in the Artemis Bookshop before going to the Phoenix Cinema because they always have new films on Friday.

I used to ask Diana about this book or that and usually I got interesting feedback from her. But my stops at Artemis got lasted longer and longer, and Diana and I got into discussions about different aspects of life, books and politics. It also involved some memories of

the war and after. She told me of how London was devastated by the bombing and how she walked to work through the ruins of buildings (that may be just after the war!). She also told me of going to Yugoslavia during Tito's time to help with reconstruction. I remember my wife Wendy was surprised that this quiet person has undertaken such adventure! But I know that Diana has a good heart and would volunteer to help any where in the world, if given the chance.

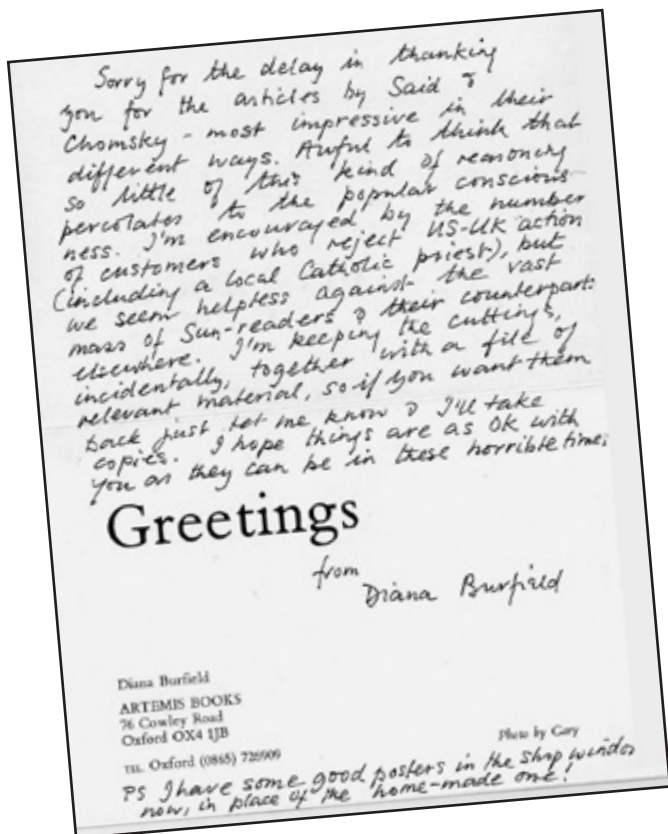
She always took an interest in current affairs, especially in troubled regions like Iraq;



Diana Burfield in her shop around 1990



Cowley Road: the traffic light is almost in front of Artemis



Card sent by Diana Burfield to Rahim Hassan after the 1991 attack on his country Iraq

my country. She sympathised with the oppressed people of Iraq without falling into the war sympathiser's camp. After retirement, she used to phone me every now and then to discuss the situation in Iraq and other parts of the Arab world.

But politics was not the main subject of our discussions. She used to talk to me about her time with Tavistock as a publisher and the scholars and intellectuals she met, including Foucault. I always encouraged her to write down these memories because they were part of the intellectual scene but also because they put these intellectuals in a different light. She told me that Foucault was mischievous and kept changing his mind and that people didn't know what to make of him. She also told me a few things about his translator that shook my confidence in his translation. I got the feeling that she didn't like either of them! She took interest in the people who came to her shop. She told me once that an Egyptian walked in looking for someone to discuss Hegel with him or to help him with the English language. She asked me if I knew him. He wrote and translated a few books on Hegel and other philosophers but he had heard that there was an active



Diana Burfield

Diana's life in short

Diana was born in Milford on Sea, Hampshire, brought up in Lee, south London, ... at Bedford College, London, she changed from modern languages to psychology and anthropology, joined the Communist party and spent a month in 1946 with Martin Ennals and others as a pioneer building a Yugoslav railway.

She then moved from one short-term job to another, as teacher, medical helper, market researcher and industrial psychologist, ... She first came to rest as an editor for Argosy, the long-defunct short-story magazine. [...] In her spare time she helped out as an archaeologist on the excavations under St Bride's, the journalists' church in Fleet Street.

After Tavipubs, Diana embarked in the 1970s on a PhD at the University of Bath about the emergence of theosophy. But she got sidetracked into sorting out the Theosophical Society's Bloomsbury bookshop. When her reforms proved too reasonable for the society, Diana transferred her newfound skills to Artemis Secondhand Books in Cowley Road, Oxford, which she ran till she retired.

In her retirement years, in Witney, Oxfordshire, she started writing for herself, ..., publishing an excellent biography of an architect-ancestor Edward Cressy, *Edward Cressy, 1792-1858: Architect and Civil Engineer* (2003), ... She also wrote an 'expurgated' account of Tavistock Publications (published in the journal *Management & Organizational History*, May 2009). An article about another family bookseller of radical hue, the anarchist FR Henderson, has yet to get into print.

Andrew Saint
The Guardian, 29th Jan. 2012

Bookshops

Hegelian group in Oxford and he came to join them. He seemed without prior arrangement to have arrived in Oxford and ended up in some accommodation in Cowley. I guessed his name straight away. But ever since I have been amazed at how this guy could translate from English without really having command of the language! She told me once that a minister of education stopped by on his way to a political debate, looking desperately for Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*. (It seemed like last minute reading!)

She was also interested in knowing where her

books went. Years after she retired she kept saying: I wonder what happened to all those books! Who bought them? What did they do with them? Well, I built the core of my library round the books I bought from her shop. I took it as a maxim: if Diana had this book in Artemis, then it must be good. I would pick it up, have a short discussion, and the book was sold! I was, actually, in Kant's famous phrase, 'groping in the dark' in my intellectual endeavours.

Diana always talked to me about her education and how, later in her life, she went to study

Anecdotes

12 August 1995. Elderly couple are passing window outside. Overhear her say to him, "This is the poor end of town. It's called Cowley Road."

17 July 1996. Armenian man to whom I had mentioned I was going to close the shop: 'Terrible to lose shop - an institution. I have been coming here in various guises for many years, with and without a beard.'

Educating the Minister

As a contrast to the mental, occasionally intellectual, exertions of running a second-hand bookshop, I decided to find an evening class offering a manual skill and, from the excellent selection available in Oxford, happened on furniture restoration. [...] We all brought along portable items to work on, boxes, small tables, chairs, and suchlike. We learned the techniques of doing minor repairs [...] stripping, staining, polishing, even French polishing, caning, re-fixing veneers, with some quite creditable results. One of my pieces was a Victorian balloon-backed chair which I had rescued from a house in East Oxford where I had been summoned to make an offer on the books of a deceased lady whose relatives were anxious to dispose of the contents. They were making a bonfire in the garden of the siblings of this elegant little chair, and were quite happy to let me have it for a trifling sum. Duly cleaned and re-polished, with its seat re-caned, it made a pretty addition to the miscellaneous furnishings of the shop. Because it was rather fragile, it occupied a little corner near my desk, for the occasional conversational customer to perch on.

One afternoon, a thin bespectacled man hurried in, attended by a younger man carrying a briefcase. The aide was dismissed with instructions to make his own way to the station, and departed looking slightly disconsolate. His boss made a tour of the shop in



Diana's book on her great great grandfather Edward Cresy

sociology at Bath University. This might have been what encouraged me to study philosophy formally (BA & MA from London University) after 12 years of finishing a PhD in physics.

She found in retirement the time for her writing projects. Her main project was the life and work of her great-great grandfather Edward Cresy. (Edward Cresy: 1792-1858, Architect and Civil Engineer). I remember that she sent me the advert for the book with a comment like: It is only when



The shop next to the Green Village was Artemis Books

the practised way of the hardened book-collector, eventually arriving at the shelves nearest me, where he climbed onto my chair to reach for a book on the top shelf. I spontaneously exploded, informing him that I had spent a great deal of time restoring the chair and that he should use the steps provided. Apologies were forthcoming, the book secured, and a cheque book produced to pay for it and some others. I recognized the signature of Robert Jackson, MP for Wantage (1983-2003), currently Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Education and Science, a post he held from 1987 to 1990 in the Thatcher government, and well known to the trade as a book-collector. I was amused to find that the title responsible for the incident was a not very distinguished late-nineteenth century copy of Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, source of the much-cited "sweetness and light". Evidently the Minister was taking his brief seriously.

A little while after he had left, I wandered aimlessly round the shop and noticed a briefcase lying among some pamphlets displayed on a table by the door. It was pretty obvious that it belonged to the Minister, so I opened it in the hope of finding a local address, which indeed I did, in the shape of the text of a speech he was due to deliver to the Oxford Union that very evening. I resisted a temptation to replace it with a copy of the *Communist Manifesto*, and instead rang Michael Watts at the Bookshop at the Plain, which seemed a probable port of call on the ministerial progress back to base. And so it proved, and the Minister and his baggage were reunited.

Japanese

A noticeable increase in the number of Japanese customers occurred over the period from 1980 when I bought the shop. They included Japanese dealers, who were mainly interested in cheap editions of English Literature, which they bought in large quantities, suggesting there had been a phenomenal increase in English-language teaching - at once a side-effect and a driver of globalization.

From Diana's memoirs
For access to the memoirs, please write to: Tony Walters at:
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Bookshops

they thought it is impossible! She intended, I think, to write a book on Edward's son, also called Edward! But it seems to me that she got a bit disheartened by the state of publishing and she doubted that anyone would publish such a book.

However, she got a book published and a few pieces completed. You can Google her name and find references to a letter she wrote to the *London Review of Books* (LRoB Vol.32, no.14, 22 July 2010) and some correspondences with R. D. Laing (1927-1989), author of *The Divided Self*. (The 6 letters correspondences,

Shifting the Rubble

(Extracts from Dianna's letter to LRoB, Vol.32, no.14, 22 July 2010)

I was intrigued by Rosemary Hill's discussion of the shifting interconnections between class, travel, antiquarianism and the incipient professionalisation of architecture and archaeology in the 18th and early 19th centuries (*LRB*, 24 June). My great-great-grandfather the architect Edward Cresy (1792-1858), from a long line of upwardly mobile Kentish carpenters and builders, set off in 1816 with his friend George Ledwell Taylor on what they rather self-mockingly described as the Grand Tour, largely on foot. Their *Architectural Antiquities of Rome* appeared in 1821 and *The Architecture of the Middle Ages in Italy* (including the first modern survey of the Leaning Tower of Pisa) in 1829. The illustrations show them at work with plumb lines and sketchbooks while aloft on sturdy scaffolding, and Taylor in his autobiography describes various archaeological digs for which they enlisted the muscle of the local peasantry. Cresy himself certainly got his hands dirty back in England, reporting finds made while trenching his own vegetable garden.

[...] Cresy's career follows a trajectory from the classical preoccupations of the early 19th century, through the Gothic imaginings of the Regency to the utilitarian concerns of the Victorian age, but underpinned throughout by structural interests as much as aesthetic ones. He insisted on being both architect and civil engineer and his last appointment was as superintending inspector for the General Board of Health, reporting on the sewerage, drainage and water supply of 16 towns in the South of England.

It should perhaps be emphasised that field archaeology involves heavy manual work. In the early 1950s I participated in excavations in the City of London, the numerous sites having been cleared in a preliminary way by the Luftwaffe. The Roman and Medieval London Excavating Council employed two splendid navvies to shift the rubble, and the few volunteers supervised by even fewer archaeologists carried out the barrowing, trowelling and so forth preceding the more delicate operations conducted by the professionals, whose expertise was far too scarce to waste on manual labour – though the navvies had themselves become pretty knowledgeable.

Diana Burfield
Witney, Oxfordshire



The question of Modernism

Notes of the Wednesday Meeting 3rd January 2018

PAUL COCKBURN

It was suggested that currently Modernism, including post-modernism, seems 'light' when compared with the philosophical Modernism of the 1920s. Maybe there was more depth in the thinking of those times. One suggestion was that as we get older we are not so receptive to modern ideas, we prefer the older ones!

Identity politics seems to be important now, with modern social media leading to a 'dumbing down' of fruitful debate. Perhaps the diversity of more strongly held exaggerated opinions leads to confusion and a lack of authority in debates.

We moved on to talk about self-identity and the importance of stories and narrative. We internalize the stories such as fairy tales we are told as children, and we also probably internalize our own individual life stories as we tell them to ourselves so to speak. In terms of society as a whole what is our 'foundational' story? It seems that in many parts of the world with the growth in educational opportunities and immigration there needs to be (and there are opportunities for) true dialogue and understanding between those from different cultures. However, it is often hard to know and understand others well. In terms of identity, those who settle in a foreign country often have an



Berlin Wall

internal dialogue between two different national cultures, and it can be tough. 'We are condemned to be free'.

Our identities change over time, and in terms of national identities this is sometimes the result of revolutions. We discussed how in Eastern Europe after the fall of communism in the 1990s there were big social and political changes, not all positive. In terms of economics increased American financial and political influence replaced the former Soviet system, and this influence has not always been positive. Revolutions it seems rarely fulfil their initial promise.

The Wednesday

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An Enigma in Poetry



*That Love is all there is,
Is all we know of Love;
It is enough, the freight should be
Proportioned to the groove.*

The above poem is by Emily Dickinson (1830 – 1886), an American poet of extraordinary qualities. Though she had a full social life when young and was very well-educated, she withdrew into seclusion and wrote over 1700 short but startlingly original poems. Her themes are love, mortality, God (though she was not conventionally religious) and nature.

Was there ever a poem about love as succinct or strong as this one, or which more invites psychological and metaphysical reflection?

Barbara Vellacott