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The Wednesday

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Editorial

The Quest for the Absolute

'The Absolute' in German philosophy came out of two questions: one epistemological, the other ontological. From the epistemological point of view, the post-Kantians were concerned with Kant's philosophy in three respects: knowledge, ethics and aesthetics. These almost correspond to the three faculties that Kant suggested: understanding, reason and sensibility. His successors were concerned with the principle that unifies reason and also the whole Kantian philosophy. The second question is ontological: what is the ground of the experiencing 'I' or the subject? Both questions are related and unified in the concept of the Absolute (although for some, particularly the Romantics, the Absolute cannot be conceptualised.)

Kant did not mention the Absolute. He talked about the Transcendental I or the transcendental subject. His subject is a formal condition of relating all experiences to one centre. He called it the transcendental unity of apperception. But his successors, particularly Fichte, thought that Kant's subject was too close to experience to be fully transcendent. Fichte thought that he could solve both questions with what he called Transcendental Idealism, or making the I absolute.

Fichte's scheme for subjectivity involve making the Absolute I as the first principle and the ground of experience. It is through the unfolding of the first principle that you can derive the whole system of knowledge, ontology and ethics.

According to Fichte, the Absolute I posits itself as an I (or call it, the empirical I) and its opposite; the non-I. The Absolute I is sheer activity and as such there is no reflection (in the literal sense of reflecting back) and hence no consciousness. The Absolute I is also absolute freedom. The I is limited by the non-I and through their interaction consciousness and the world arise. The opposite is also true, that through an intellectual Intuition, the empirical I, reflecting on itself, realises its base in this absolute freedom and activity and strives to be this Absolute I. It also realises that it is a mind (reason) free from the limitation of the non-I (or the world). Kant objected to this scheme in a famous letter denouncing Fichte. He thought that it was 'mere logic, and the principle of logic cannot lead to any material knowledge.' However, this logical turn, which finds its major development in Hegel, gave rise to a powerful movement in German thought with the rise of a young group of poets, novelists and artists, known collectively as the German Romantics. Their initial contribution was in philosophy, with Holderlin's critique of the idea of Being in Fichte, Novalis' Fichte Studies, and Schlegel's critique of foundationalism in epistemology (and philosophy generally) and his call for philosophising in the middle.

However, the contribution of the German Romantics to the idea of the Absolute is remarkable. They conceive of it as a transcendent (rather than transcendental), beyond the reach of the individual. Kant kept to the transcendental I that is a formal condition of the possibility of experience; Fichte placed that Absolute beyond the empirical I (or the Kantian I) but within the subject. (One can understand it, approximately, as consciousness and subconsciousness.) But these young thinkers and artists, some of whom met Fichte personally, thought that the Absolute is a reality beyond realisation.

In our time, when the idea of transcendence has been marginalised, the Romantic's Absolute has been given a more immanent role, and has become famous from the title of J. L. Nancy and P. Lacoue-Labarthe's *The Literary Absolute* and other books. But this is not the only way to think of this Absolute. The metaphysical orientation of their thinking and sensibility is worth a renewed interpretation.

The Editor

In *Nietzsche Haus* in Naumburg
A Visit to Nietzsche's 'Maternal City'

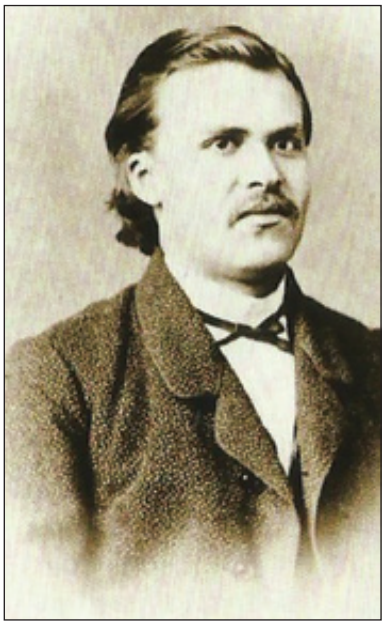
The Nietzsche-Haus in Naumburg, Germany, is dedicated to the life and work of Friedrich Nietzsche. In the summer of 1858 Nietzsche's mother, Franziska Nietzsche, moved with her two children, Elisabeth and Friedrich, to 18 Weingarten in Naumburg, the site of the Nietzsche-Haus. She rented a bright, spacious apartment on the upper floor. In 1878 she bought the house and continued to live there until her death in 1897. When Germany was divided the house fell under the communist state, but after the unification of Germany it was opened to the public in 1994 as a museum. In October 2010, the Nietzsche Documentation Centre opened, dedicated to research into and critical engagement with Nietzsche. Here is a report on the state of the house and its changing history.

PAUL ENOCK

In E.M. Forster's *Howard's End*, two characters who share a German connection and an interest in historic buildings – Mrs Munt and Helen Schlegel – together lament the condition of the Romanesque cathedral at Speyer, which, they agree, has been 'restored beyond recognition'. The ladies conclude that 'the principles of restoration are ill understood in Germany' and that when it comes to their historic monuments, 'the Germans … are too thorough, and this is all very well sometimes, but at other times it does not do'. (*Howards End* E. M. Forster, 1921, reprinted by Vintage Books, 1954, page 8).

Nietzsche-Haus in Naumburg

Having witnessed, since the reunification of the 'two Germanies' in 1990, the 'cementification' and whitewashing of many an ancient Burg and Schloss in the former Democratic Republic, I have had occasion to agree with Forster's ladies on this point. But, happily to report, the magnificent high-medieval cathedral at Naumburg has been spared excessive restoration; its twin-paired towers and masterfully carved details in limestone (the local *Schwammkalkstein*) are still allowed to display the discolouration of time. And although it is lo-



Nietzsche

Nietzsche's father

cated close to the epicentre of the German Reformation, the cathedral preserves many of its original treasures, including its painted statues of noble patrons (the *Stifterfiguren*), featuring Margrave Ekkehard II and Margravine Uta. The couple stand among a group of nobles in a prominent position above the second of two choir enclosures, from where they look down on proceedings at the main altar. The young Friedrich Nietzsche attended the Dom Gymnasium attached to this cathedral for three years. Did the bright youngster, I mused, ever gaze up at these dignified and authoritative aristocratic figures, and perhaps wonder at the contrast their healthy, refined countenances make with the tortured and blood-bespattered Christs that dominate the aisles?

Nietzsche's place of birth, the small country village of Röcken, is about 20 miles from Naumburg in the then Prussian state of Saxony (modern Saxony-Anhalt). Röcken was to be forever associated with Nietzsche's father, who was vicar of this small parish until his early death from '*Gehirnweichung*' ('softening of the brain') at the age of thirty-six. Friedrich was just eight years old at the time. Towards the end of his life, as the philosopher was approaching a similar fate, Nietzsche wrote:

> 'I am no more than my father over again, and as it were the continuation of his life after an all-too-early death.' (*Ecce Homo,* tr. Kaufmann)

Forced to vacate the vicarage at Röcken, Nietzsche's mother came to Naumburg in 1858, eventually renting upstairs rooms at 18 Weingartenstraße, a respectable but modest boarding house set among cramped artisans cottages on the south-east edge of the city. By this time Friedrich was a boarding pupil at nearby Pforta (*Schulpforta*, previously attended by Fichte and Schelling), but could visit his family (an all-female household consisting of his mother, sister, paternal grandmother, aunt and maidservant) at weekends and holidays. The house in Weingartenstraße remained Nietzsche's 'maternal home' for the remainder of the philosopher's active life. In 1878, with help from an inheritance, and with help from her son, who was now a professor at Basel University, Frau Nietzsche was able to buy the house and live from the income of renting out its apartments. This she did until her son, having suffered an irreversible mental breakdown in Turin in 1890, was returned to her. He remained in the house for the following seven years under his mother's care.

The city of Naumburg provided, then, a kind of 'fixed maternal axis' in the philosopher's troubled life. Nietzsche's ambivalent attitude to the city (stemming from his antagonism to German culture in general) is well described in the introduction to the illustrated brochure of the *Nietzsche Haus*:

> 'The thought of few other philosophers is as closely intertwined with their biography as that of Nietzsche. … [In Naumburg] and in Schulpforte the gifted youth received a solid education, for which he would remain grateful, especially for the access it gave him to classical literature. However, most of what Nietzsche attempted to free himself from in later life, and from which he was never really able to escape, was manifest here in

> the Protestant small-town life of Naumburg. No matter how much physical and spiritual distance he attempted to interpose between himself and his native land, Nietzsche remained bound to his mother and to this city on the River Saale as if by an invisible umbilical cord. If there was any point of restful equilibrium between the locations of Nietzsche's later existence: Basel, Sils-Maria, Niece and Turin, then it was Naumburg – even though the city remained more a pole of repulsion than one of attraction for him." (Sigfried Wagner in *Nietzsche in Naumburg, Stadtmuseum Naumburg, Nietzsche Haus* 2013)

Readers of Nietzsche's late autobiographical piece will recall the scorn he pours on a society too complacent to notice the emptiness of the moral shell it continues to inhabit. Nor does he spare Naumburg's cuisine or even the local wine, which he blames for having spoiled his ability to tolerate the drink in later life. Commentators have also noted Nietzsche's remark that his only doubts about his theory of the 'eternal return of the same' were caused by the thought that, if it were true, his mother and sister would have to return to this world. Against this background, and given the events that had gone immediately before, and those that were to come, one can see much poignancy in the photograph used to advertise the Museum's permanent exhibition. Taken in 1891, the incurably ill Friedrich posed for this studio portrait with his mother. The philosopher is as well turned out as ever, has a youthful appearance and is seemingly quiescent. His mother has a determined expression and holds on to her son's arm with an air of proud finality.

Franziska Nietzsche with her famous son

The Fate of Nietzsche's House

Sad to relate, the *Nietzsche Haus* itself has suffered the fate lamented by Forster's fictional ladies. It has not been preserved, restored or renovated so much as 'saniert' – (the German term for 'refurbish' or 'rehabilitate' conveys the aseptic bleakness of its interior) – each room scrubbed thoroughly clean of its past, washed over and neutered in white and pale grey. No period décor, no original furniture, no wallpaper, nothing, apart from the shape of the rooms and their vistas to provide a hint of what they felt like to live in – just black-framed display cases on the bare floors and walls. Only the scuffed and creaky wooden staircase with its cupped treads (surely Franziska Nietzsche would have kept these wax-polished in her day?) and the sloping floors upstairs remind you of the age of the building.

To be fair to the curators, the house had fallen into neglect ever since 1897, when Franziska Nietzsche died, having dedicated the last years of her life to nursing her 'darkness-stricken' son. The philosopher's sister, Elisabeth, then promptly sold the house, moving her by now fully incapacitated brother to Weimar (a place he would have avoided), where she established and personally supervised

Schulpforta in 1890

the first Nietzsche archive. Nietzsche's maternal home was first overshadowed by the grander Weimar archive and then, after 1945, suffered a fate similar to that of the philosopher's reputation in post-war Germany. Again, in step with the philosopher's reputation, the building underwent 'ground-up refurbishment' in 1991.

Sadly, no trace remains outside of the luxuriant foliage, whose deep shade frames Franziska's pale, smiling face in a famous photograph of her on the spacious veranda – an image that inspired Curt Stoeving's painting of her son in the same setting.

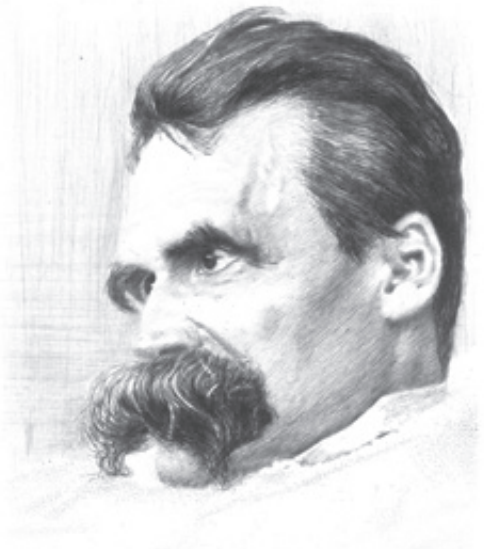
As for the exhibits inside, although the display cases contain, as one would expect, many photographic portraits, personal letters and (for the most part facsimiles of) documents in the philosopher's own hand – both as a schoolboy and later as an author – the overall impression is of a sparse offering. No signed first editions, no original paintings, no personal mementos.

Again, to be fair, the price of admission is minimal – just 3 euros – and the sole attendant present was positively apologetic in tone. When I mentioned that one room contained material from an exhibition that had closed over a year before, she replied, 'Of course, otherwise the walls would be bare'. One senses an ongoing struggle (perhaps some 'resentiment'?) between this relatively new *Nietzsche Haus* museum in Naumburg, and the sumptuous Henry van de Velde designed *Nietzsche Archiv* in Weimar, which was officially opened in 1903, three years after Friedrich's death. Adorned with Hans Olde's portraits of the ailing philosopher and embellished with original documents and mementos, the atmospheric Weimar establishment absorbed the funding donated by the philosopher's friends and admirers after his death, and benefitted from the Nietzsche cult under the National Socialist regime, which the philosopher's sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, did much to promote.

My partner, Silke, later speculated that perhaps the imposing modern *Nietzsche Documentation Centre*, a futuristic concrete and glass construction that has incongruously arisen next door to the *Nietzsche Haus* in Naumburg (and which appeared deserted on the Thursday afternoon of our visit) may have consumed much of the funding that could otherwise have gone to improving the quality of the newer museum, and to extending its purchasing power for permanent exhibits.

Nietzsche in the DDR

(or Nietzsche in the Deutsche Demokratische Republik)



[The following text is a translation of a poster which formed part of the exhibition with the title 'Nietzsche, deutsch?' ('Nietzsche, German?'), shown by the Nietzsche Museum, Naumburg in 2015.]

PAUL ENOCK

In post-1945 Germany, Nietzsche's legacy was still overshadowed by the claims of his fascist-sympathising adherents. While West Germans never succeeded in agreeing on a unified image of the philosopher, in the East, the verdict passed on him by Georg Lukacs held sway: Nietzsche was a 'destroyer of reason' and had been a 'trailblazer' for Hitler's rise to power.

SINN UND FORM

Despite this, the Nietzsche archive was not destroyed: Villa Silberblick *[the house in Weimar to which Elisabeth Förster transferred her brother during the final stages of his illness, which she purchased following Nietzsche's death there on 25th August 1900, and which then became the Nietzsche Archive]* was used as a lodging house for researchers at the *National Research and Memorial Sites of Classical German Literature in Weimar*; regional broadcaster *Thüringer Landesfunk* moved into the Nietzsche Memorial Hall and Nietzsche's posthumous papers were inventoried under the Goethe and Schiller archives. The fact that there they remained inaccessible to researchers and readers from the DDR simply contributed to the impoverishment of thought in the Republic. Remarkably, sufficient magnanimity was retained to allow two communists from Italy, Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, free and unrestricted access to the source texts for the first critical complete edition of Nietzsche's works.

In 1980, passages from Nietzsche's texts appeared for the first time in the DDR. Issued in

East Berlin and printed on the cheapest quality paper, they formed part of a *Chrestomathy in the History of Recent Bourgeoise Philosophy* issued by the State Ministry of Higher Education for exclusive distribution to the country's philosophy departments. This was followed, in 1985, by a deluxe facsimile print of the manuscript for *Ecce Homo*. With a price tag of 230 DDR Marks, it was clearly aimed at the Western export market. […] Slowly, things were starting to move. Nietzsche had, in any case, long been a rumbling underground presence in the art and literature of the DDR.

On 31st December 1986, the Council for the District of Weißenfels placed Nietzsche's grave in Röcken under a protection order as a historical monument … 'due to its historical/ cultural significance for Socialist Society' as the official form put it. Precisely what significance the professed anti-Communist had for Socialism was a matter to be sounded out in open controversy.

Following the revaluation of Luther (1983), the second greatest innovator of the German language was to be included by the DDR in its (foreign-exchange earning) concern for its cultural heritage. In Issue 5/1986 of the journal *Sinn und Form [Sense and Form]*, Heinz Pepperle first posed the question of whether Nietzsche's image was ripe for revision. When Wolfgang Harich countered this proposal in Issue 5/1987, saying that, rather than setting up a monument to him, the warmonger should be consigned to the void of oblivion, he triggered an avalanche of protest. In the following issue eight authors set out a case for the full and unrestricted rehabilitation of the outlaw. Moreover, during the 10th Writers' Congress in 1988, Stephan Hermlin warned against a regression back to the requirement for unanimity of opinion many had believed to be a thing of the past.

Perhaps it was no coincidence that the last great intellectual debate to rage in the DDR was to be sparked by, of all people, Nietzsche. Yet another sign of the philosopher's continuing explosiveness. And yet, strange to relate, this controversy allowed itself to be interrupted by the downfall of the socialist state – before the underlying questions could be confronted. As if the matter had been resolved with the reunification of the two German peoples. In truth, it was only now that the sundering contradictions of a globally negated humanity first came to light.

Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche

The Delusion Of Pure Reason

DAVID **BURRIDGE**

Kant argues and sets out in his *Critique of Pure Reason* to demonstrate that there is such a thing as a-priori cognition. His evidence of this fact is for him proof that metaphysics exists and pure reason can be attained without reference to empirical knowledge. I think this is flawed. It is important to understand that pure reason for Kant was not just an interesting principle but a provable fact, as valid as any that might be discovered in what he termed the natural sciences.

My argument is that cognition is only an interaction of the mind with experience. There are of course three dimensions to experience:

(1) the immediate presentation of sensory images through our faculties. Here the brain immediately formulates them into recognisable phenomena.

(2) There is past experience stored in our memory like old films or photographs. These are more often than not pulled out of memory by the triggers from the currently experienced images. We connect up or differentiate the images in the pool. Thinking goes on through the language of images.

(3) There is one further dimension and that is the anticipated images. Of course these are drawn from current and past experiences and enable us to piece together what might happen. This is our essential survival or development kit.


Critik
der
reinen Vernunft
von
Immanuel Kant

Critique of Pure Reason

The important thing is that we think using current or past experience or that we formulate future ideas by applying these experiences to future judgements even if these are based on reasonable belief. (I define reasonable belief as meaning that there is sufficient evidence to conclude, that on the balance of probabilities a particular judgement is correct). There is no cognition if we do not engage experience; antaraxia maybe a pleasant state to rest the mind, but it doesn't get anything done. I argue that pure reason is an empty proposition and the only way we can test the value of any thoughts is to put to them to the empirical test.

But what of maths and science – aren't there principles that pre-exist out there for us to discover?

Of course, there is a world of cause and effect and principles to learn and understand. Our cognition develops the understanding through experience. I learn a mathematical principle by working hard learning to solve equations for example. I am not concluding like Hume that the only things we can know are pure perceptions. We use perception to think, measure and draw conclusions.The problem of metaphysics is that if we work on the assumption that the truth lies somewhere deep in our souls we end up with vague maxims that have no value because they have not been transformed into practical empirically justifiable judgements and concepts.

The Gentle Pragmatist

DAVID **BURRIDGE**

When considering what drives morality: *why must I do something?*, the fundamental issues of authority and duty are raised. I see three alternatives and view them as three houses of high virtue.

Firstly, there is the religious house where the authority is the Universal Being and duty is determined by scriptures or holy representatives.

The second is the house of deontology (Kantian). Here the authority is an inner goodness which we can discover when we push aside all our low inclinations exercised in the empirical world. Once we are tuned into this pure goodness we can issue maxims of morality without even glancing into the empirical world.

The third house is the one that belongs to the gentle pragmatist. He has a notion of goodness and fairness, but sets out to test and develop them in the real world. He doesn't expect perfection, and learns from experience. The object is to generate benefit for the most people and to explore why it produces that benefit so that it can be produced consistently in the future.

It might be argued by a Kantian that my Pragmatist could not even know where to start if he didn't have access to some inner goodness. I have no problem with there being an inner sense of humanitarian concern or fairness, but it's a vague notion and to make those feelings work effectively we need to test them empirically, taking into account all complexities of conflicting interests. This is how legal systems should operate, applying the tests of lawfulness and natural justice, just to ensure the detail is still on track (from a humanitarian point of view).

Never mind whose authority is declared, promulgations are valueless, if they are not drawn from evidence and open to review in the light of experience.


Critik
der
practischen Vernunft
von
Immanuel Kant.

Practical Reason

Kant

Angel

ALAN PRICE

Is what we call dying an instant departure,
in a border-town hotel not of our own choosing?
Bed, chair, blind, washbasin and now bottle
of morphine in a briefcase. Benjamin, devoid
of a visa, for the dirt road journey through Spain,
washes his face and stares at the other Benjamin
in the mirror. Then a swooning. Not into the arms
of some permitted afterlife, but a great armless dark.
His companion angel eases out of its watercolour
home to come and kneel beside his body.
The Angel of History **hesitates to pray, for it carries**
its own tablets in a wing's side pocket. Yet in that
moment, beside a man not quite a philosopher,
not quite an historian, not quite a critic, not quite
a storyteller, not quite a poet but always a radiant
thinker, it turns into something quite human.
Its sorrow beyond any thought of a tryst in death.
When the morning cleaner arrives, ***Angelus Novus***
smiles at the Benjamin who loved it even when
backing away from a glut of horrors. It returns
to the frame of Klee to hide in a recess, of a room,
in Berlin, protected from the progress of war.

Walter Benjamin

'Stag' by Dianne Cockburn

My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here;
My heart's in the Highlands a chasing the deer;
Chasing the wild deer, and following the roe;
My heart's in the Highlands, wherever I go.-

Robert Burns 1790

(Robert Burn's Birthday 25th January, 1759)

Identity and Recognition of the Other

Are we in fact born harmoniously into the social world? My own early philosophical investigations didn't suggest this, but some think Heidegger and Lacan (for example) are exaggerating the scale of the problem. Also, how should we read philosophers who were popular in the 1960s when existentialism still ruled in a bigger way than it arguably does now?

DAVID **CLOUGH**

In the last five years Bruno Latour has headed a movement that seeks to limit the dominance of critique as for example in the influential Frankfurt school. But two women scholars, Linda Hutcheon and Rita Felski, have tried to come to terms with this issue. The latter wrote *The Limits of Critique*.

Two years ago, I was reading about the rise of Latour in a debate between Peter Osborne and Steve Connor about the relation between politics and history. While Osborne might not have been as linear as Ricoeur about time, the necessary sense of a plot, and the objections Ricoeur expressed as to what happens when multiplicity and simultaneity become too complex, were on my mind. Ricoeur felt that the reader tends to impose something simpler onto such a situation and maybe I too am in this position to an extent.

Recognition and the Other

But suppose there is another way to pose my question. Does the rise of essentially agonistic identity politics automatically imply a decline in our reconciliations with otherness, particular with the issue of recognition? Originating with Hegel, this idea was also an important theme in the 1980s and 1990s with Axel Honneth's *Struggle for Recognition* and also some of Charles Taylor books

But what if we reject existential and or psychoanalytic versions of alienation and only have the Marxist one and only see alienation in labour and production terms? If we are fragmenting into smaller identity cells (where the social imaginary used to be a Western unified concept, like Berger's *Sacred Canopy*) do we still feel alienation within our own group or (as my drift implies) only in relation to the increased otherness of other groups, as seems to befit contemporary trends?

One view (as with critique) was that Hegel, Honneth, Taylor and Ricoeur are too optimistic about what recognition can actually achieve. But I had to query whether Ricoeur was really that optimistic and maybe some others were taking a renewed interest in his so called middle way. Alongside a more obvious renewed enthusiasm for Sartre and Foucault was there a new kind of balance as maybe found in Eagleton's *Hope without Optimism*? I needed a balance between optimism and pessimism that still allowed for the possibility of tragedy. I found some resources in Rita Felski's edited volume *Tragedy Revisited* and Terry Eagleton's *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic*.) But maybe identity is related to narrativity. Judith Butler and Cavarero's relating narratives were hot topics early at the beginning of this decade. The idea that Cavarero agrees with Scheherazade's endless telling of stories might have some link with Agamben's *The End of the Poem*. I found Bonnie Honig a bit nearer the Taylor side of the debate.

So, where I perhaps had started with Kristeva I now found myself reading Honig as the post Arendtian political philosopher who wrote nine years ago her book *Emergency Politics,* but after

that started writing about migrants, and then Judith Butler's book on *Antigone*. I wanted to know, I suppose, how Agamben fits in here, and also the angle he takes when reading the Egypt orientated writings of Jan Assmann.

Immigrants

In Honig's piece on migrants was Moses really just an Egyptian? Central to Honig's arguments are stories featuring 'foreign-founders' in which the origins or revitalization of a people depend upon a foreigner's energy, virtue, insight, or law. The biblical stories of Moses and Ruth to the myth of an immigrant America, from Rousseau to Freud, foreignness is represented not just as a threat but as a supplement for communities periodically requiring renewal. Why? Why do people tell stories in which their societies are dependent on strangers? One of Honig's most surprising conclusions is that an appreciation of the role of foreigners in (re)founding peoples works neither solely as a cosmopolitan nor a nationalist resource.

I read some Sennett and Bauman. I might remember George Simmel's provocative remark that the outsider adapts better than those who feel entitled to belong, or Cocteau's remark that true originality consists of trying to be like everyone else but failing, or the other comment I found that hope begins where management ends. Where I had seen the outsider in Camus or Colin Wilson as a rebel, we were seeing him or her more as a foreigner or refugee now. A shift was going on, one I have originally only vaguely sensed around ten years ago trying to read Kristeva, particularly her books *Strangers to Ourselves* and *New Maladies of the Soul* though I stopped since reading her. I only attempted the more recent book on *Forgiveness* at the late Pamela Anderson's suggestion.

Today the other is supposedly an equal but with unequal rights or access. But our discussion of politics and mental health today maybe sometimes ignores the issues of alienation at birth or birth trauma and the difficulties each of us face is still largely a matter of luck. While I have never been a doctrinaire Lacanian, by extending Heidegger's concept of throwness towards an inchoate alienation of body, image and language, he seemed to have or to make a point. Frank Sulloway had talked in terms of birth order, but what about birth trauma. Kristeva comes to mind again and Otto Rank wrote a book with it as its title, though Freud rejected it on the grounds it was anti-oedipal. Rank went on to have his celebrity friendships with Henry Miller and Anais Nin which lead us indirectly to the *Big Sur* and the 60s scene where Huxley and others tasted California twenty years or so before Foucault did as well. Ricoeur being at Chicago wasn't quite this crazy perhaps.

Bruno Latour

Internal/ External Views

I suppose what I was thinking was that these psychoanalytic difficulties, even Ricoeur's rather toned down and modest 'striving to be' (as the effort to exist or go on living) cease to be psychodynamic inner issues and start to be seen as varieties of unjust political imbalance. There was always something vaguely bourgeois about such inner issues that wasn't there for much of the left, but even the non-left liberals of the market also seem to like the externalisation of these issues. This might seem controversial or it could seem just obvious depending on how much we ourselves lived through the 60s and later decades of the last century. The consumer ethos of the liberal depthless self becomes more standard and both discussions of politics and even mental health move away from the culpability of the individual to lesser or greater degree onto some societal institutional or governmental failing.

The need for a new social imaginary

Notes of the Wednesday Meeting 17th January 2018

PAUL **COCKBURN**

We examined several topics. One of them was the concept of the 'social imaginary' – how groups view themselves in a social sense: in terms of the set of values, institutions, laws, and symbols through which people imagine their social whole. We are perhaps all conditioned by our upbringing – in our family, our school and education, and in our jobs. Our nation also influences us, in terms of customs, traditions, common language and culture. The Greek philosopher Castoriadis thought that all societies create their own imaginaries (which include institutions, laws, traditions, beliefs and behaviours) but we need to be aware of this fact, take control and create a new social imaginary.

Modern society in Britain generally does not believe in God, or takes very little notice of Him. If there is a God, then man has the potential to be good. If there is no God, then man is simply the product of nature, and in Nietzsche's terms has still to reach the status of the 'Ubermensch' or 'Overman'. As Oscar Wilde wrote, 'we are all living in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars'.

In the future, will machines or robots take the place of humans? If we have driverless cars, will the machines use moral arithmetic to ensure the least damage occurs in dangerous situations where lives are at stake? How will humans be different from sophisticated machines? Humans can express themselves in many different ways, a machine would be programmed by humans. Would a machine be able to show real empathy, or would it seem false? Heinrich Boll wrote of the terrifying scenario where all is determined in a human life. Can robots be self-resilient, be undeterred? Could they have free will?

How can things change for the better? Do we need a revolution to challenge the status quo? If people were starving a revolution could start from the grass roots, from below, as the French Revolution seems to have done. But revolutions seem to end up being led from the top, and then failing.

With the current recent levels of migration in Europe, social unity has been under threat. Fichte says even if we have different views, we must agree on something if we carry on talking to each other. In any nation, there are symbols and institutions which unite us. The euro has helped to unite Europe. But can we achieve a global society and avoid wars?

Reason reigns supreme in Kant's philosophy, but cultural differences and feelings seem difficult to overcome. Kant thought increased trade between nations would lead to the end of wars. But in the modern world superpowers build business empires to take control of trade, or fight wars by proxy (as in Syria). But even these powerful states cannot foresee all changes and control everything, and they do not have 360-degree vision. And fast change seems to be a certainty in the modern world.

We discussed the Maoris in New Zealand and Palestine. The Maoris are a spiritual people who have integrated Christianity with their native beliefs, and are a strong force in New Zealand. The Palestinians have a dream of establishing a new state in the future, and are very productive in the arts and follow an aesthetic ideal. The modern world seems to be growing more diverse. Minorities within a country are wanted or tolerated in some cases because they are needed. However, a weak society may throw the blame for its problems on a minority, leading to persecution.

Castoriadis **Erich Fromm**

Notes of the Wednesday Meeting 24th January 2018

David Burridge introduced the topic of freedom based on the work of Erich Fromm (1900-1980), particularly his 1941 book *Fear of Freedom*. Fromm's work embraces sociology, psychology and psychoanalysis as well as philosophy. Fromm wrote that every society is characterized by a certain level of individuation beyond which the normal individual cannot go. We have an I/we relationship in society, we are born into and live in a community. However, relationships can default to those of master/slave and domination/submission in terms of behaviour.

Fromm admired Freud's work, but he thought Freud viewed society as oppressing the individual, whereas Fromm thought you needed society in order for the individual to flourish.

We discussed the psychology and behavioural norms in the workplace, where bosses can be dominating and try to stifle and control those working for them. Perhaps bosses should recruit workers who have skills that they (the bosses) do not have, rather than seek like-minded people.

The autonomy of the individual was discussed: much of our behaviour is based on habit, but we can adapt. We tend to switch between different roles and personas, carrying out the particular routines or habits appropriate to them. We can adapt or change these habits. Is this freedom? An interesting question was asked: if we were to base our behaviour on reason alone, what is the reason for us to not follow through on an action that we decide rationally is the best course of action? Are we weak-willed in this case? And will we then suffer from guilt?

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Only a smile

Only a smile can cross the divide
between us. Eyes probe
from separate spheres to connect.
It can lighten all dark
moods, gets the tender side
of everyone's soul.
But look, see deep
into our hearts, straight into the abyss
of feelings. They clamber into our eyes,
hidden tears in fear of escape, with sparkle
of shatter proof glass to guarantee them.

Scharlie Meeuws

Scharlie Meeuws is a German born digital artist and poet who has several collections of poems in her name. Her poems written in German, Spanish and English have been discussed in the national press as well as in various writing sites by her many fans online.

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