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The Wednesday

Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group at Albion Beatnik - Oxford

Editorial

The Critical Project of the Enlightenment

Talking about Enlightenment is becoming fashionable now but I am not going to review any of the recent books. I want, instead, to point out the historicity of the Enlightenment and that the project of Enlightenment has moved on since Kant wrote his famous essay 'What is Enlightenment?'. In fact, as I will argue, it is Kant who has introduced a change in the nature of the project, perhaps without being aware of it.

The Enlightenment, in most of the recent books, has been frozen in time and there is a nostalgia for the past. The assumption is that we live in a time of a regress to irrationality and the cure is reason. First, there was the anti-Enlightenment reaction that had been attributed to Romanticism. But this is not completely true because the Romantics expressed a high degree of philosophical sophistication in their arguments. Then religion was blamed and here again philosophical arguments were used, especially by Friedrich Jacobi, to point out the limits of rationality. However, with the rise of religion it was assumed that a high dose of rationality and the insistence on reason would combat this trend. But as John Gray points out in one of his articles: 'Religion is spreading most rapidly in the parts of the world that are modernizing most quickly, such as China and Brazil, and it is worn-out secular ideologies that are being everywhere discarded.'

My point is that we lose sight of the Enlightenment when it becomes a thick stick to beat a real or imaginary foe and achieve a cheap victory. A cheap victory is no victory and does not solve the problem. We have to understand the spirit of the Enlightenment and its history. The movement started when the condition of the time was one of oppression by the state and religion. It became a critique of both and a support for free thought and the rise of science. The idea was that reason could reach reality and get a clear picture of it; that the new science could translate it into its own mathematical language and gain a mastery over it. But when Kant came on the scene, he changed the critique from conformity to an external reality to looking at the condition of the possibility of experience and the limits of reason. He called his project a Critique. The idea caught on and was carried further by both Fichte and the early Schelling who called it Critical Philosophy.

The idea was further developed by the Young Hegelians. It was no longer how consciousness captures reality but how consciousness becomes infected with distortions. This was argued in the theoretical sphere, particularly in relation to Christianity, by Feuerbach. The latter thought that explaining the state of consciousness for a belief was enough to refute the belief. But Marx came on the scene and turned this thought around. It was no longer the change of ideas but the change of the material base of society that matters. Reason was deemed to have been enslaved by the material base and had to be aware of this in its reading of any phenomena. This was a radical move that generated a major critical movement, especially when it was used in sociology and cultural studies by the Frankfurt School. But then the idea of critique has moved on from the sphere of production to other, diverse, spheres and has taken up the causes of marginalised groups, such as ethnicity, feminism, racism, identity and difference. What unites all these projects is the idea of a critique that started with the Enlightenment. The question of Enlightenment has shifted a long way and those who keep going back to the critique of state and church and raising the flag of science are forgetting the long history and the changes in the original question that have to be emphasised and reconsidered.

The Editor

Is the Enlightenment Project still alive?

Kant's essay 'What is Enlightenment?' of 1784 and its continuing relevance

Kant called for Enlightenment but did not consider his age as 'Enlightened.' He thought of Enlightenment as a continuous process that is for ever expanding. His optimism has been reinforced in our time by Habermas who called it 'Modernity' and described its project as 'An Incomplete Project'.

The article below is one of a short series that attempts to review the major texts that contributed to the concept and movement of the Enlightenment, starting here with Kant's famous article on the subject.

DAVID **SOLOMON**

When Kant wrote his famous essay for the magazine *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (Berlin Monthly) in 1784, he was responding to the question, contained in its title, which had been posed in the previous year. The question, originating from Johann Friedrich Zöllner, (a clergyman who was also a civil servant of the Prussian government), was itself a response to an essay of one of the editors of the magazine entitled 'Proposal, not to engage the clergy any longer when marriages are conducted'. The original essay provoked a number of responses directly and indirectly, of which Kant's contribution was one. We can note two things in the content and tone of 'What is Enlightenment?'. Firstly, Kant, and many of his contemporaries, were conscious of themselves as living in a distinctive age, an age characterised by being an 'Age of Enlightenment':

> *If we are asked, 'Do we now live in an enlightened age?' 'the answer is, 'No' 'but we do live in an age of enlightenment. As things now stand, much is lacking which prevents men from being, or easily becoming, capable of correctly using their own reason in religious matters with assurance and free*

Kant

Zöllner

> *from outside direction. But on the other hand, we have clear indications that the field has now been opened wherein men may freely dea1 with these things and that the obstacles to general enlightenment or the release from self-imposed tutelage are gradually being reduced. In this respect, this is the age of enlightenment, or the century of Frederick.* (Kant: What is Enlightenment? PP. 4-5)

In Kant's description of human history, which he describes in this work and in others (such as 'Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View' written in the same year), this history had been marked by a gradual progress. Humanity had advanced by a process of trial and error, intellectually, technologically and morally, from its original primitive animal state in the direction of understanding, reasoning, autonomy and freedom. This process had accelerated in his own time, which could therefore be characterised as an 'Age of Enlightenment'. As the above quotation makes clear however, he takes pains to distinguish this formulation from any alternative description of his time as being an 'Enlightened Age'; the implication being that the process could not be regarded as complete or even near completion. What had accelerated was the impetus and speed of the process of enlightenment. This statement here further implies that enlightenment (i.e. the process of moving towards enlightenment) is not just the property of a particular age (e.g. his own) but to some degree characterises the entire history of humanity. In his own time, he regarded the process as having speeded up, undergoing a step-change in degree. This needs to be kept in mind as an antidote to the tendency that we might otherwise have of particularising the Enlightenment, of regarding it as the characteristic of a particular place (e.g. Europe, America) at a particular period of time (e.g. starting from the later 17th century and extending through the 18th and into the 19th centuries).

The second point to note is that Kant is not just describing a period, or the history of humanity. There is a tone of urgency about this essay, which we can regard as moral urgency. Enlightenment is not just something we live in and make observations about in a self-congratulatory way. We have an obligation to bring about our own enlightenment, a duty to our own humanity. Throughout many of his works Kant draws the distinction between heteronomy – determination by either other external powers or by the 'other' in oneself (one's own lower inclinations and desires) – and autonomy, which is self-determination in

accordance with our own authentic intellectual and moral freedom. The latter for him is true human nature.

Enlightenment is a task we set ourselves and that it is our duty to fulfil. There are several parts of this essay where we can see this. For example, he criticises attempts to 'fix' religious doctrines, that is, to set them up as unchangeable dogmas that cannot be questioned and improved upon. Such attempts at fixing might be justified 'for a short and definitely limited time, as it were, in expectation of a better', but if we do this for too long, even for the lifetime of a single individual, we will hold back the process of enlightenment, which completely goes against human nature. and what he calls its 'proper destination'

> *Such contract, made to shut off all further enlightenment from the human race, is absolutely null and void even if confirmed by the supreme power, by parliaments, and by the most ceremonious of peace treaties. An age cannot bind itself and ordain to put the succeeding one into such a condition that it cannot extend its (at best very occasional) knowledge, purify itself of errors, and progress in general enlightenment. That would be a crime against human nature, the proper destination of which lies precisely in this progress and the descendants would be fully justified in rejecting those decrees as having been made in an unwarranted and malicious manner.* (What is Enlightenment? PP. 3-4)

and again:

> *But to unite in a permanent religious institution which is not to be subject to doubt before the public even in the lifetime of one man, and thereby to make a period of time fruitless in the progress of mankind toward improvement, thus working to the disadvantage of posterity - that is absolutely forbidden. For himself (and only for a short time) a man may postpone enlightenment in what he ought to know, but to renounce it for posterity is to injure and trample on the rights of mankind*. (Ibid, P. 4).

If the process of questioning institutions and doctrines were held up for even one lifetime this would itself be a betrayal of the task against human nature. and what he calls its 'proper destination' and an injury to human rights. Taking these two points together (the fact that enlightenment is not the characteristic of one period but of the whole of human history to a greater or lesser degree, and that enlightenment involves not a description but an ethical task), we can arrive at Habermas's conclusion that the Enlightenment is an unfinished project (much as Kant himself thought) and one which is incumbent on ourselves today to further.

> So, what characterises the task that is enlightenment? Simply put, enlightenment is the process of growing up, the transition from the stage of Unmündigkeit (immaturity, dependence) to one of Mündigkeit (independence, autonomy), analogous to the transition from childhood to adulthood. It is characterised by the slogan *sapere aude* **(**Dare to be wise):
>
> *Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. Sapere aude! "Have courage to use your own reason!" that is the motto of enlightenment*. (What is Enlightenment? P. 1).

We have to use our critical reason in the face of 'a book which understands for me, a pastor who has a conscience for me, a physician who decides my diet, and so forth'. It is laziness, cowardice and fear of the unknown that prevents our doing

Berlinische Monatsschrift.

1784

Zwölftes Stück. December.

I.

Beantwortung der Frage:

Was ist Aufklärung?

(S. Decemb. 1783. S. 516.)

Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbst verschuldeten Unmündigkeit. Unmündigkeit ist das Unvermögen, sich seines Verstandes ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen. Selbstverschuldet ist diese Unmündigkeit, wenn die Ursache derselben nicht am Mangel des Verstandes, sondern der Entschließung und des Muthes liegt, sich seiner ohne Leitung eines andern zu bedienen. Sapere aude! Habe Muth dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen! ist also der Wahlspruch der Aufklärung.

Faulheit und Feigheit sind die Ursachen, warum ein so großer Theil der Menschen, nachdem sie die Natur längst von fremder Leitung frei gesprochen

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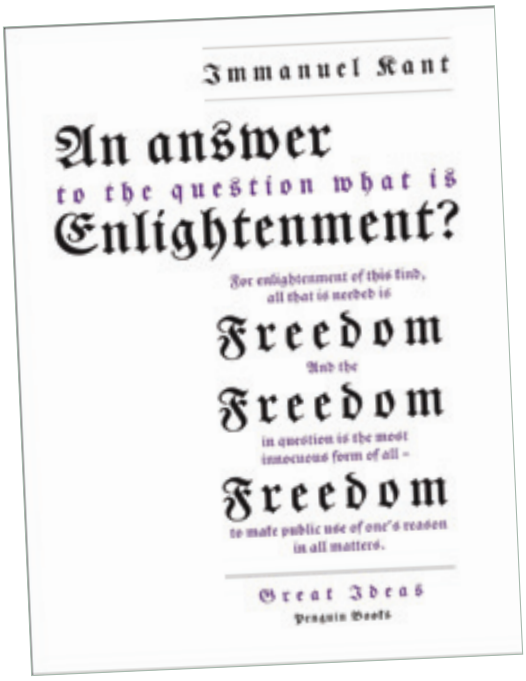


Immanuel Kant

An answer

to the question what is

Enlightenment?

For enlightenment of this kind, all that is needed is

Freedom

And the

Freedom

in question is the most innocuous form of all –

Freedom

to make public use of one's reason in all matters.

Great Ideas

Penguin Books

Berlinische Monatsschrift (Berlin Monthly) 1784

this. How far can our obligation to question and think for ourselves go, and how far is it compatible with the demands of stability and social order? Here Kant introduces his famous distinction between *public* and *private* use of reason**.** This is sometimes misunderstood to mean that our critical reason should be expressed in private and therefore be part of our private use of reason. On the contrary our critical rational engagement with the world is an expression of *public* use of reason. It is in the public interest and it is expressed in dialogue with a wide audience, from what Kant called a 'cosmopolitan' (= world citizen) perspective. Private use of reason by contrast is the technical rationality that we perform in our capacity as citizens engaged in particular tasks. If we are citizens it would involve (in contemporary terms) filling out our tax forms. If we are technicians or public servants it would involve using our knowledge and skills to perform our duties.

Kant says that citizens cannot refuse to pay a tax that they do not agree with. But they can use their public use of reason to criticise the tax in principle. Likewise, a clergyman should be free to criticise the doctrines of a church, but in his capacity as a clergyman has to preach those doctrines in force at any one time, or else in the case of a complete conflict, quit.

Kant is pointing to a crucial distinction in the use of reason between what we could call 'instrumental reason', and 'critical reason'. This is particularly important in our time, when there is an increasing emphasis on instrumentalism in contemporary education, in producing 'experts', who are technically skilled in solving problems, at the expense of engaging critically not only with science but with the basic values of society. He saw individuals as living in two worlds, occupying a particular role, a private space for the sake of the functioning of society, and at the same time exercising the ability to step outside that role and engage with the greater whole, the fundamental questions of society. Everywhere he sees the danger that the public use of reason would be under attack, a tendency Habermas calls 'colonisation':

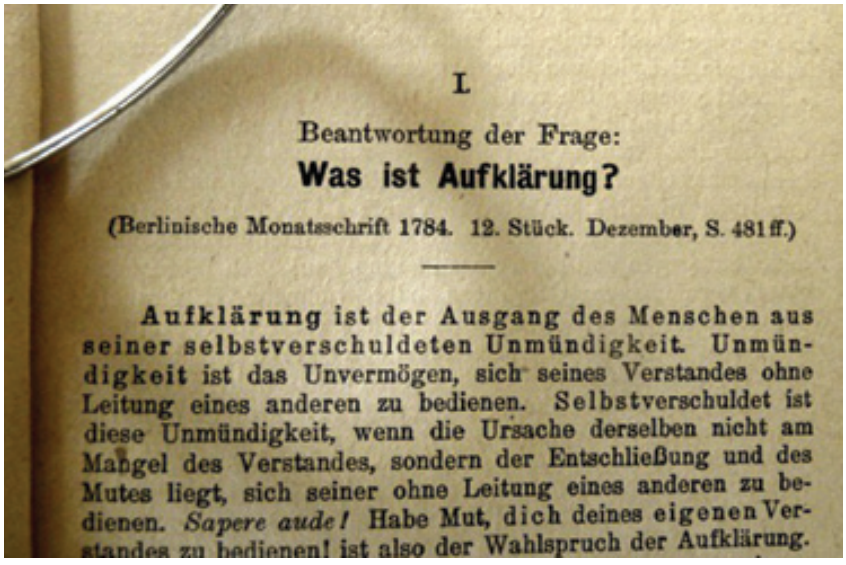
> *But I hear on all sides, 'Do not argue!' The Officer says: 'Do not argue but drill!' The tax collector: 'Do not argue but pay!' The cleric: 'Do not argue but believe!' Only one prince in the world says, 'Argue as much as you will, and about what you will, but obey!' Everywhere there is restriction on freedom*. (Ibid, P. 2)

What this implies is that Kant sees there is a contamination of the public use of reason by the private use of reason. The cleric in his metaphor, in addition to being able to order us to believe forbids us to argue. Against this, Kant affirms that we can still believe or practise in our capacity as member of a particular

church but without this affecting our freedom to question or speculate about God, spirituality etc. publicly. As elsewhere in his philosophy, we inhabit two worlds. Awareness of the distinctiveness of these two worlds preserves the identity of each and prevents the public use of reason from being colonised by the private.

He gives one example of an exception to the contamination of the public by the private use of reason. The 'one prince in the world' who said 'Argue as much as you will, and about what you will, but obey' was Frederick II of Prussia, a ruler who was known for his tolerance of the free expression of thought, and whose court became a refuge for intellectual exiles like the materialist and atheist La Mettrie. In this essay, the area that he emphasises as being in most need of freedom of thought and expression was that of religion. In fact, he sees the advance of humanity through enlightenment and the spiritual evolution of religion as akin. Whether Kant was in a strict sense a believer or not, he certainly saw religion as an evolving practice and a developing series of doctrines whose progress should not be held back institutionally. Religion is dynamic, always moving forward like reason itself. There can be no valid statute that tries to keep it in a permanent state. A large part of 'What is Enlightenment' is devoted to religion as the pre-eminent field in which humanity needs to develop maturity and independence of thought. It is worth recalling that the whole debate about the nature of Enlightenment was sparked off by the essay in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* by one of the editors entitled 'Proposal, not to engage the clergy.any longer when marriages are conducted'. The limitations on the power of the state to affect the public use of reason is also a limitation on the power of the state itself, whether it is organised as a monarchy or a republic. It happens that he thought monarchies (especially under 'enlightened' monarchs like Frederick II) would be more amenable to the public use of reason than most republics. But the significant thing is that the touchstone of the legitimacy of any order is its capacity to foster the move towards enlightenment.

Kant's essay 'What is Enlightenment?' is significant today for asserting and defending the idea of the public use of reason. It is important because of its implication that enlightenment is not a completed thing but a movement towards a goal, which at any time including our own is incomplete and unachieved, a project that we cannot take for granted but we have a duty to advance. We should therefore also think of ourselves as living in an 'Age of Enlightenment'. Finally, Kant's intense questioning of the significance of his own time, opens up the possibility that we too can subject our own age to similar radical scrutiny. In my next essay I will examine the late 18th century period of The Enlightenment from the slightly different perspective of another philosopher, Kant's contemporary Moses Mendelssohn.



I

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Kant's 'Was ist Aufklärung?'

Love and Vulnerability: In Memory of Pamela Sue Anderson

Pamela Anderson (Photo by Guy Burt)

The *Wednesday*

The Faculty of Philosophy and the Faculty of Theology and Religion of Oxford University organised a three days conference (16th – 18th March) in memory of Pamela Sue Anderson (1955-2017), Professor of Modern European Philosophy of Religion at Oxford. A large number of philosophers and theologians from Oxford and abroad had attended and gave lectures.

The conference focused on Pamela Anderson's largely unpublished, late work on love and vulnerability but also included reflections on her earlier writings. They reflected Pamela's contribution to theology and feminism. While focusing on love and vulnerability, participants explored connections with related themes drawn from her work, such as forgiveness and its limits; dialogue; epistemic injustice; self-confidence; nonsensicality; ineffability; and vulnerability in relation to invulnerability, violence, human and divine affectivity, narrative, friendship, thoughtfulness, resilience, belonging, and enhancing life. Her engagement with Kant, Wittgenstein and the French philosophers, Henri Bergson, Paul Ricoeur, Simone de Beauvoir, Emmanuel Lévinas and Michèle Le Doeuff, were also represented. Carla Bagnoli referred to Anderson's engagement with the Kantian conception of the self. Roxana Baiasu drew on existential phenomenology (more specifically, on Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty) to develop Anderson's positive re-conception of vulnerability as 'openness' in new directions in the areas of the metaphysics and epistemology of vulnerability.

Nicholas Bunnin discussed Anderson's 'internal dialogues' with Spinoza, Kant and Lévinas. and argued that Pamela drew on all of these in her feminist philosophical vision of the unities of mind and body, reason and emotion, and fact and value. Beverley Clack considered how the practices of friendship might shape the practice of philosophy in the twenty-first century and also the nature of the university.

Paul S. Fiddes' talk was more personal. He discussed his conversation with Anderson, for 16 years, over the dynamics of an act of forgiveness. He thought that forgiveness (as distinct from an act of pardon) is an unconditional creative event of empathetic engagement in the experience of a person who has committed an offence, enabling the offender to respond to the offer of renewed relationship. Anderson raised problems with this approach, mainly on the grounds of doing justice to women who were victims of wrongdoing, respecting their integrity and sense of righteous anger, and ensuring their autonomy. Dorota Filipczak, University of Lodz, Poland, talked about how the female (often feminist) philosopher tends to be perceived from the angle that is never divorced from her physicality. Her femaleness then undercuts or ruins her reasoning, or else her reasoning is seen as a disappointment because the woman as an object and not the subject of discourse has long been enmeshed in constructions that turn femaleness and intellect into a binary opposition. Morny Joy talked about Vulnerability, Ethics and Ontology. Adrian Moore talked the relation between philosophy and the feminine, between philosophy and the masculine, and between philosophy and the human. Stephen Mulhall addressed the question of whether there might be secular analogues of the theological virtues. Günter Thomas explored the intimate connection between love and hope. There were many other speakers with no less interesting views.

The Dark And Light Sides Of Being Vulnerable

Remembering Pamela Sue Anderson

DAVID CLOUGH

The Pamela Sue Anderson event was partly about the remembering of her by those who worked alongside her, but it also gave space to those trying to further her ideas, even if they did so by fusing them with their own positions. This tribute event was mainly at Mansfield College between Friday 16th and Sun 18th of March 2018, about a year after her funeral, and it increased my understanding of what really lay behind her work. In this tribute I will concentrate mostly on the names of those I already knew from previous events, and tell you about those events, as well as this posthumous event.

I first met Pamela at an unusual Ricoeur-focused day at her college, Regents Park College, where she was Reader. A couple of Ricoeur books had come out in the wake of his death in 2005 and as I had read them already and they came within her interest in Kant, Arendt and Ricoeur, though I was not so grounded in Kant as the base. But as I and others found, she was amazingly lively and welcoming. Todd Mei of the Ricoeur Society was there and I and others went to the first UK conference in June held at his base, Kent University at Canterbury, a couple of months later, where Pamela was one of three keynote speakers. In September there was a religion and literature event at the Quaker Meeting House and I had by then started making contact with George Pattison's circle of students at Oxford as well. It was Pattison's Kierkegaard connections that led me towards Alison Assiter who opened the memorial tribute papers this time.

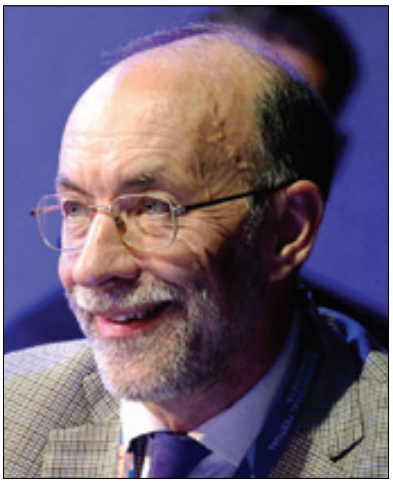
Through Anderson I met Morny Joy from

Morny Joy talking about Pamela and Ricoeur

A portrait of Pamela Anderson revealed during the event

Paul S. Fiddes

Stephen Mulhall



Adrian Moore

Calgary in Canada and she spoke again about how she and Pamela met Ricoeur in the early 1990s and discussed his desire to reduce violence and his paper called 'Fragility and Responsibility'. This was not quite the same as 'Love and Vulnerability' but it was certainly close. Four years ago, Pamela gave a talk in Oxford on Kant's 'Metaphysics of Morals' and the early Ricoeur view of the Voluntary/ Involuntary. Kantianism she said was dominated by the problem not just of willing, but by the notion of 'pure will'. Following the early Ricoeur attempt to make Kant fully intelligible, all human feeling, desire, fear need to be proportioned to this willing. Reason and sensibility need not be so opposed if Ricoeur succeeds in relating them phenomenologically.

I have also to mention my trip to Chester with Pamela and Beverly Clack, the Brookes University Lecturer, noted for the book The Philosophy of Religion. Pamela it seems had many dialogue partners, some local, like Clack or Battersby, and some further away, like Morny Joy. There were quite a few Wittgenstein-based speakers at the Pamela's event, most prominently Stephen Mullhall and Sabina Lovibond and the Spanish speaker Chon Tejedor.

Although Amy Hollywood wasn't at this event I know she discusses Pamela and Grace Janzen in her book *Acute Melancholia* and her focus is more on Derrida and Judith Butler. Pamela's engagement with Butler was still a bit opaque to me but I went to several meetings where she was clearly wrestling with the book *Giving an Account of Oneself*. I bring Hollywood in here because of the similarities (or not) to what has already been said about Ricoeur, as she thinks Pamela's Kantian philosophical theology can't properly do desire, even when it starts appealing to Deleuze. Initially, through Kristeva's *Tales of Love*, and books about St Bernard or Richard Rolle, I sympathized with the view that male philosophers, even Charles Taylor in *Sources of the Self* don't capture this type of devotional selfhood. It came out a bit differently in Adrian Moore's resistance to gender in philosophy using the standpoint of Bernard Williams. Everyone there knew Moore was Pamela's friend and authored her Guardian obituary.

There was less discussion of mediaeval mystics than I thought there might be partly because the focus was on how women victims suffer now. Is this still about some kind of fighting back? Pamela would have seen it as being about restoring esteem or self-respect. True if some do seem to want to cleanse the world of violence, assuming all to be patriarchal, it certainly impinged on Paul Fiddes' theology, but the mood was realistic not idealistic. It was about living up to death and Gunter Thomas was leading the Enhancing Life project of which Pamela's later work, up to her death, was a part but as Amy Hollywood says Butler is often misunderstood in merely allowing liberal self-determination which her convoluted identity theory probably doesn't hold. Not simple identity politics in other words.

On Saturday around 2pm a portrait of Pamela commissioned while she was ill and completed posthumously was unveiled at Regents Park College.

Forgiving Friends and Enemies

Notes of the Wednesday Meeting 21st March 2018

PAUL COCKBURN

David Clough went to the conference on 'Love and Vulnerability' which took place recently in Oxford in memory of the philosopher Pamela Anderson. Pamela was a professor at Regent's Park College in Oxford and died last year. A few of us went to the open philosophy seminars she held at the college a few years ago. Before her death she worked on a project called 'Enhancing Life'. She saw human beings in Ricoeurian terms as capable, but also vulnerable as we have to cope with the vicissitudes of life. Life is precarious, and as vulnerable human beings we can be undone by one another in grief, rage and desire.

We discussed whether there is a gender bias in philosophy. Is truth genderless? There are very few female philosophers until the 20th century when feminist philosophy gathered pace. Now we have many, for example Judith Butler, Irigary, Kristeva, Arendt, and Simone de Beauvoir. And of course, there are many more. In terms of vulnerability, the recent Harvey Weinstein scandal and the 'Me Too' phenomenon highlight the abuse that many women suffer. Is there a duty for women to forgive such abuses? One suggestion was to imagine there is a part of me that could forgive such abuse and wait till you can find that part and honour it so to speak. Forgiving is hard and sometimes can only be achieved after a long time. 'It is easier to forgive an enemy than a friend.' (William Blake) The desire for justice and sometimes revenge can lead to resentment and the injured party can be damaged by this. But the perpetrators of violence should also be viewed with compassion as well if they are reacting to the bullying they themselves have suffered in the past. In terms of vulnerability, there is a male stereotype of self-sufficiency and toughness, shrugging off hardship and not admitting any weakness. In terms of sexuality and 'Me Too' there are clearly men who use their power to obtain sexual favours. But there can also be a 'honey-trap' aspect to the behaviour of women and girls when they dress in a seductive way.

Are we vulnerable on-line to Facebook and other companies manipulating our opinions? It seems that even democracy is under threat here as these companies analyse our on-line habits and data. We are stronger perhaps when we feel we belong, we have a strong local group identity, as exhibited say by the working-class mining communities in the North of England.

David Clough

Implicit/ Explicit Knowledge

Notes on Wednesday Meeting Held on March 28th 2018

We discussed implicit and explicit knowledge, and the nature of truth. Explicit knowledge is usually based on reason and is scientific or propositional in nature. By reason we can derive mathematical laws and theorems, and by experiment confirm them empirically. A scientific law is generally true or false, but implicit knowledge it was felt could be personal and unconscious, more like being on a journey. We may have a goal and we are on the road to achieving that goal, but we are not really sure where the road will take us. It may be knowledge of ourselves, unconscious or related to our memories in an associative way as we metaphorically pass the same signpost time after time. We journey on within a framework, with limited knowledge, and as we do so we can change gradually or sometimes in a 'revolutionary' way.

We talked again about the conference 'Love and Vulnerability' commemorating the life of Pamela Anderson. David Clough thought there were many followers of Kant present, so maybe the days of the 'post-modern' and 'post-truth' eras are numbered! The problem with the 'post-truth' society is we are all vulnerable to being swayed or persuaded by 'subliminal' messages that we receive on-line. These messages are derived from the analysis of data gathered from millions of people, with expert analysis showing what psychological groups we might belong to, what 'pushes our buttons'. Democracy is now threatened by this.

Paul Cockburn

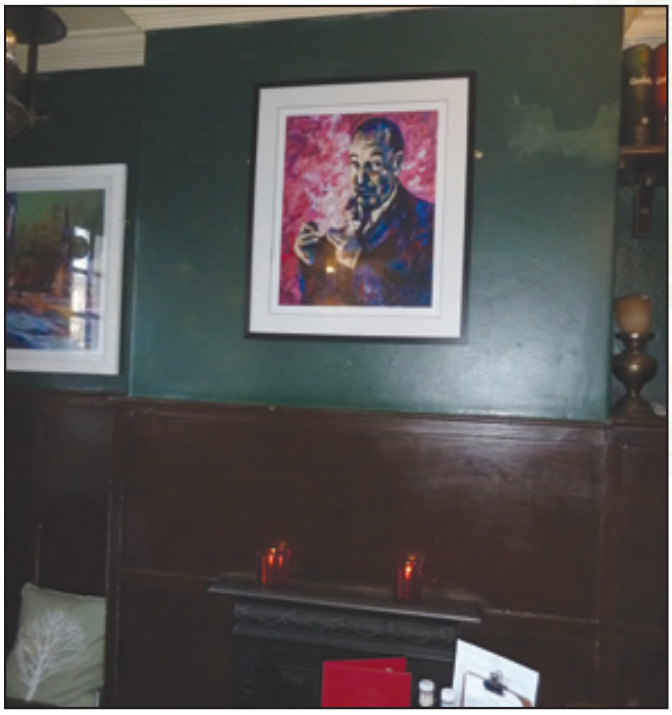
There is an a priori or truthful dimension to our thinking, whether it is a priori mathematical reasoning or the analysis of the world presented to us by our sense perceptions. But maybe we can 'make truth' so to speak in conversation and dialogue with others. There is perhaps a genealogy of truth, and we are on a journey to find it. The recent BBC 'Free Thinking' broadcasts from Gateshead are an example of 'blue sky' thinking, where the impetus seems to be to break away from tradition and history, to reach out to the new. We are held back by too much history. But is truth compromised if we ignore history? In our present 'post-truth' era ideology seems to be preferred over facts and expert opinion, and fake news seems to be about dumbing down and confusion. Why don't we know the truth? It seems to lead us to deeper truth to be critical and open, but this perhaps leads to us having no firm convictions, even to losing our way. In the confusion we may drift back nostalgically to seemingly old certainties like nationalism.

In terms of reforming the state, Kant wanted this to be done gradually rather than by a revolution. We might hope the 'right' ideas will win as society accepts them, but as we look back history seems to show that the ideas that win are often harmful. Nietzsche believed the strong make the truth, the weak are resentful and follow the herd. Maybe we just have to keep on hoping truth will be revealed!

Poem by ***Scharlie Meeuws***

Visit to an Oxford Pub*

Everything seems altered
in a rainstorm. Houses are blurred
at the edge. A door opening. An escape
signed *the Eagle and Child*,
or is it *the Bird and the Baby*?
It is warm here and cosy,
nooks and crannies to explore,
where the Inklings have dreamed up
their manuscripts and poems
and seen the light in dark hallways
of their imagination.



In the Rabbit Room I have
battered fish and crispy chips,
a sweet berry crumble, and I try
thinking away the tourists, until
I hear them talk about Lewis and Tolkien
under the memorabilia all over
the walls. A whisper about women
admitted to the University in the fifties
which led to the old friends
bitterly disagreeing, while secrets of Narnia
are spilling out with pints of cider.
Here the food is yum. You can feel
the ghosts in the booth next to you.
And you warm up with the veg, mash and gravy.
It's all here.

• The pub is the *Eagle and Child* in Oxford where the *Inklings* group of writers, poets, philosophers and lecturers met regularly. Their photos now adorn the pub and become a tourist attraction.

'*Oxford*' by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Brecht's Masterful Depiction of Galileo's 'Heretical' Struggle

DAVID CLOUGH

Bertolt Brecht's masterful depiction of Galileo's 'heretical' struggle to overturn the prevailing orthodoxy was performed, in a translation by David Hare, at Oxford Playhouse on 28th March and it purports to portray the conflict of dogma and science in new atheist style, but there are contemporary resonances despite the supposed passion for free thinking now. Don't we have obvious new taboos emerging and a nostalgic drift back to 'old certainties' like nationalism? The play speaks forcefully to our present 'post-truth' era in which ideology is increasingly favoured over facts and expert opinion is denigrated. Instead of the new atheist version we then get the post-Trump one. Galileo's astronomical discoveries are dismissed as 'fake news' by those who prefer comforting received wisdom to the evidence of their own eyes.

Brecht

Although the production ends with Apollo 11 and we are post-Hawking now, the play was written in 1943 just before the US released the atomic bomb. During the war years, Brecht became a prominent writer of literature of exile in the US after Denmark and as well as making Galileo fairly socialist he also expressed his opposition to the National Socialist and Fascist movements in the most famous plays of this period also including: *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *The Good Person of Szechwan*, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (i.e. Adolph H), *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and many others.

A scene from the play

The ***Wednesday***

Editor:
Dr. Rahim Hassan

Contact Us:
rahimhassan@hotmail.co.uk

Website: Currently unavailable

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Contributors:

Barbara Vellacott ***David Clough*** ***Erica Warburton***
Paul Cockburn ***Raymond Ellison*** ***Scharlie Meeuws***
Prof. Chris Norris ***David Burridge*** ***Dennis Harrison***
Prof. Nona M. Ferdon ***Ranjini Ghosh*** ***Paul Enock***
Dianne Cockburn ***Sara Berti*** ***Mike England***
David Solomomn ***David Jones*** ***Edward Greenwood***
Fred Cousins ***Monika Filipek*** ***Mohamed Mustafa Kamal***

Bach Before Seven

On one leg, straight as a sentry,
arms stretched to hug the dawn.
Thoughts stripped to just balance
and harmony.

Perfect pause then back to two feet.
Before longing, craving striving
can crowd back again.
I am happily adrift,
- *Cantata, fugue or a last amen* -
in the clear knowledge,
the sweet now is all there is,
all there needs to be.

David Burridge

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To receive it regularly, please write to the editor: rahimhassan@hotmail.co.uk