

# The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group at Albion Beatnik - Oxford

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## Editorial

### *The Intellectual as a Revolutionary*

Someone wrote three decades ago, when the USSR collapsed, that it was the end of the republic of the intellectuals. What he meant is that it was the end of a state based, explicitly, on an ideology or a philosophy. It was in this case the philosophy of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. But the standard Marxist view is that it is the workers and not the intellectuals who are the leaders of the revolution. However, the events of May 1968 in France were truly the work of the intelligentsia, students, professors, philosophers and intellectuals in general. The workers came out in support and they brought the government down but the Communist party didn't support them. And despite the wide participation of the workers in this new revolution, it was the students who were creating the big impact on the street and in the media. Indeed, these events are remembered primarily for the role of the students. What the students did is to put in question the old ideology of the leading class, the proletariat. This led some leaders of the left, such as Roger Garaudy in his book *The Turning Point of Socialism*, to question socialism and Marxism and to eventually move beyond the idea of class struggle and into religion.

The student revolution, particularly in France, did change things, for example the theory of a revolution as stated above and some structural changes in the universities. But it also led to the fragmentation of the idea of a revolution. The students did not have the material power to make the revolution a success. What they did show is the inadequacy of the dominant theory about a socialist revolution but they didn't have much to replace it with. They presented grievances rather than a well worked-out theory. The failure of their revolution brought with it a wave of small extreme groups who felt that the way for change was blocked and violence was the only alternative.

This caused more damage than reform. But it has also stripped the old revolutionary class of its claim to be in the vanguard.

The outcome of May 68 is the fragmentary nature of opposition in Western societies and the rise of various pressure groups. The right has also affirmed its power and the left has lost ground. Revolutions now come from outside Europe and with religious content, such as the Iranian revolution. Some of the philosophers of May 68, such as Foucault, sided with the new change. The old idea about the revolutionary class that will inherit the world started to die, until the final moment by the end of the eighties. All the optimism shown so far did not revitalise it. The student revolution was the revolution that ended revolutions in advanced European countries. There were demonstrations here and there which showed frustration but no real revolution.

But one should not be sentimental about revolutions and glorify them. The real content is the hope of a real change that will stay as an idea or ideal. It is not about barricades and communes but the idea of a better world. France had a long history of such events throughout the nineteenth century and they were written about by some philosophers, Marx in particular. The events themselves come to an end and they become part of the past, but what stays is the idea. The idea is the power of the intellectual. It gives him the lead in any revolutionary change. It is not surprising that many of the French philosophers took part alongside their students (such as Sartre and Foucault) but they were superseded by their students later on. What matters for history is not the personalities and the glory of the moment but the ideas that live on.

*The Editor*

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Student clashes

## 50th Anniversary of May 1968 Student Riots

**There has always been student unrest across the globe but the events of May 68 were unique in their impact on the countries where they took place and in making history. The article below looks at these events and their aftermath.**

**PAUL COCKBURN**

**I**t has been a long time since a revolution to happen in western Europe. Revolutions now come from Eastern Europe or places outside Europe. The younger generation and even the generation before it has no memory of the events of May 68. That is why it is always good to remind ourselves of what had happened. There are moments in history when one thinks that history is at a new beginning and a new era will dawn. Call it a dream, a magic or madness. The power of the moment of change is blinding but the passage of time allows calmer reflections and gives a more objective evaluation.

### First some history....

It is 50 years since the student protests started in Paris in 1968. They spread to the United States, coinciding with the growth of the civil rights movement in the USA, the Vietnam War, and the end of McCarthyism (the witch-hunt against Communists). In Britain there was student discontent rather than riots. There was also

unrest in Germany, where the student leader Rudi Dutschke survived an assassination attempt in April 1968. (He went on to study at Cambridge but was deported from Britain in 1971 as an undesirable alien).

In Paris the unrest started in the university of Nanterre. One of the leaders was Daniel Cohn-Bendit. He is a Jew born in 1945 in France to a Jewish couple who fled Germany in 1933. War was on the mind of the post-war generation in France and Germany, but was also a factor in the USA as students tried to avoid the draft. Cohn-Bendit (who eventually became a politician in the European Parliament) has recently said it is also interesting that 1968 was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the First World War in 1918, and that in 1968 students were not frightened of the future – they had hope. It may be that the students were dissatisfied with the fact that it was becoming clear that the hopes of a better world and society after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War were not going to be fulfilled.



Sartre and Foucault leading the demonstrations

Nanterre was built in the 1960s on the outskirts of Paris as an experiment. It was to be a progressive new university, free of the stifling atmosphere associated with the Sorbonne. It quickly became famous as the hotbed of the student rebellion. Nanterre was closed in early May 1968 and the students occupying the site were allowed free passage out of the university. The riots then spread to the Sorbonne and the central Latin Quarter of Paris. The government tried to stop the riots with heavy-handed police action, and a general strike and demonstration was called for on May 13<sup>th</sup>. One million people marched through Paris, and the strikes spread, with two-thirds of the workforce of France going on strike!

Chaos ensued as De Gaulle the French President left the country briefly at the end of May. The Communists agreed that elections would take place in late June, and then the revolutionary fervour just died down. De Gaulle's party easily won the vote!

#### Comment:

So, what lasting influence did May 1968 have? Clearly the movement was not successful in a political sense, even though it did manage to bring France as a country to its knees for a short time. Its influence was more cultural and social. Although many of the demonstrations were violent, a lot of the protests were 'street theatre' involving clever art, and inclusive debates. A number of witty and clever slogans emerged:

*Lisez moins, vivez plus.* (Read less, live more.)  
*L'ennui est contre-révolutionnaire.* (Boredom is counterrevolutionary.)

*Pas de replâtrage, la structure est pourrie.* (No replastering, the structure is rotten.)

*Nous ne voulons pas d'un monde où la certitude de ne pas mourir de faim s'échange contre le risque de mourir d'ennui.* (We want nothing of a world in which the certainty of not dying from hunger comes in exchange for the risk of dying from boredom.)

*Ceux qui font les révolutions à moitié ne font que se creuser un tombeau.* (Those who make revolutions by halves do but dig themselves a grave.)

*Le bonheur est une idée neuve.* (Happiness is a new idea.)

The alliance between students and the workers was very strong, at least for a time.

In 2008, President Nicolas Sarkozy came to power in France saying: 'My victory shows the death of May 68 and that legacy in France, and I will destroy it forever.' But it may be that French capitalism was severely shaken by the events of May 1968 and will never fully regain its confidence.

Emmanuel Macron, the new 'centrist' French president and 'new broom', studied philosophy at Nanterre, and worked briefly as an editorial assistant to Paul Ricoeur, the French Protestant philosopher. He has said that he admires Daniel Cohn-Bendit, even though Cohn-Bendit is now a member of the Green Party.





**CHRIS NORRIS**

### May'68: A Structuralist Riposte

The peculiarity of ideology is that it is endowed with a structure and a functioning such as to make it a non-historical reality, i.e., an omni-historical reality, in the sense in which that structure and functioning are immutable, present in the same form throughout what we can call history.

We must grasp in all its rigour the absolute necessity of liberating the theory of history from any compromise with 'empirical' temporality, with the ideological concept of time which underlies and overlies it, or with the ideological idea that the theory of history, *as theory*, could be subject to the 'concrete' determinations of 'historical time'.

**Louis Althusser**

A cloud no bigger than a man's hand crosses the English Channel from Paris, and then, in an instant, the trees, the orchard, the hedgerows, the field of wheat, are black with locusts. When at length they rise to fly on to the next parish, the boughs are bared of all culture, the fields have been stripped of every green blade of human aspiration; and in those skeletal forms and that blackened landscape, theoretical practice announces its 'discovery': the mode of production.

**E.P. Thompson**



**Louis Althusser**

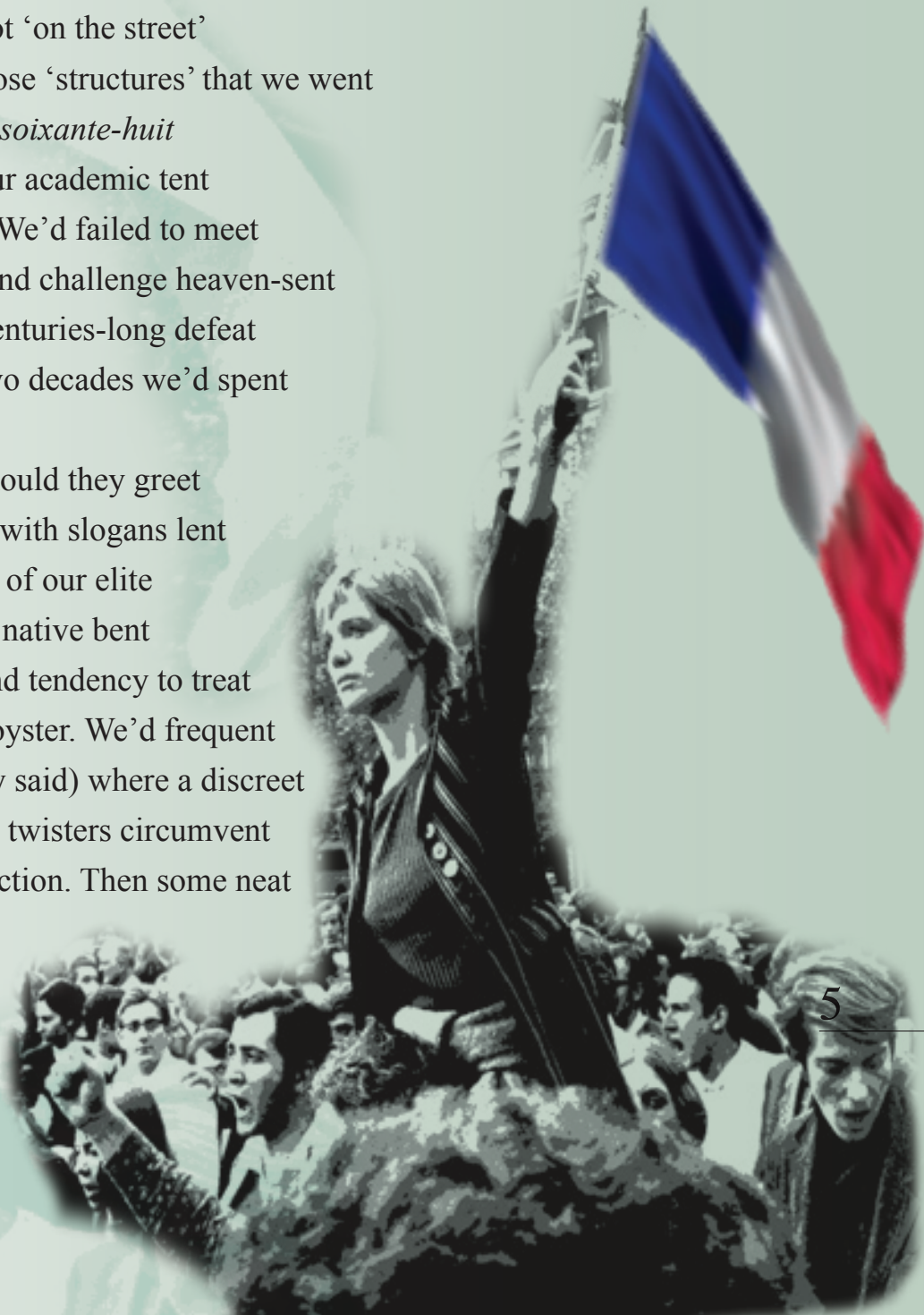


**E.P. Thompson**

‘Structures don’t take to the streets!’ (*graffito on wall of the Sorbonne, May 1968*)

OK, point taken: it’s not ‘on the street’  
You’d find them, all those ‘structures’ that we went  
On endlessly about till *soixante-huit*  
When we skulked in our academic tent  
(Or so the story goes). We’d failed to meet  
Our one great chance and challenge heaven-sent  
To end the left’s two-centuries-long defeat  
By making good the two decades we’d spent  
On theory-talk.

Small wonder should they greet  
Us lot, those militants, with slogans lent  
An added force by dint of our elite  
*Normalien* credentials, native bent  
For high-flown chat, and tendency to treat  
The world as theory’s oyster. We’d frequent  
Only those streets (they said) where a discreet  
Escape-route helped us twisters circumvent  
Our own past calls to action. Then some neat





## Poetry

Debating-trick did service to augment  
Our cultural capital, and take the heat  
Off any failings that we might repent  
Were they not wiped clean from our record-sheet  
By the fine structuralist expedient  
Of counting subjectivity a cheat  
That's foisted on us when we represent  
Ourselves as 'free'.

Thus all our thoughts repeat  
The lie that has us willingly assent  
To ideology's absurd conceit  
Whereby the hoodwinked subject rests content  
With a fake 'freedom' that would have him beat  
Its own unyielding bounds. How orient  
Ourselves to action if the driver's seat  
Of willed intent contains a subject pent  
By structures that perpetually secrete  
The solvent of each self-constituent.

That's the idea: that all those Althusser-  
Primed theorists could do, faced with the May  
*Événements*, was to disown all share  
Of agency, urge strikers to delay  
That premature revolt, and so declare  
The present *conjoncture* not one that they  
Could possibly endorse. Then they'd compare  
The current prospects with the grisly way  
Things go whenever passions start to flare  
And, as so many times before, betray  
The white-hot zealots to the black despair  
That comes of hopes and dreams long kept at bay

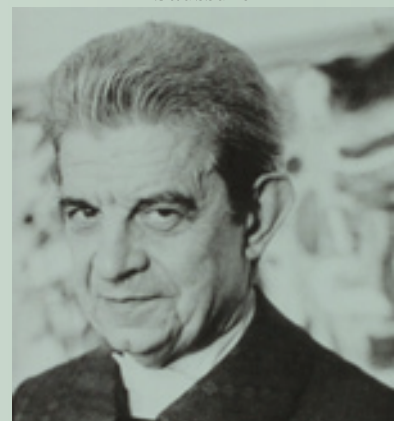
By the same powers that soon must conquer their  
Inopportune charade.

Yet I'd still say,  
All these years further on, that you'd best spare  
Us street-averse *soixante-huitards* your pay-  
Back accusations of our taking care  
To hide ourselves behind a great array  
Of abstract propositions framed to bear  
Whatever weight of evidence might fray  
Our threadbare theory-hope. It's you who err  
Most grievously if you take that cliché,  
'No structures on the streets', as if to square  
Accounts with real-world history and play  
The role of less-deceived. Who more aware  
Than us how world-events will often stray  
Far wide of anything that the armchair  
Philosopher might dream *hors de mêlée*  
Since structures don't emerge out of thin air  
But just when subjects meet the come-what may.

Quick recap for the faint of heart or weak  
Of memory: 'structure' signified the site  
Of struggle, contestation, and critique  
Where subjects found a leverage-point despite  
Appearances. It seemed to show a bleak  
Since language-based determinism quite  
Devoid of all idea that we might speak,  
Act, criticise, and thus relieve our plight  
As drifters up the croc-infested creek  
Of any ideology that might  
Recruit compliant minds.



Saussure



Lacan



Sartre



## Poetry

That's how the clique  
Of New-Right, mostly ex-left types indict  
Us true *soixante-huitards*, we who still seek  
A way to get the basic issue right,  
The one that comes to us from Ancient Greek  
Philosophy and yet remains the blight  
Of system-builders as of those who'd sneak  
Free-will back into some (it seems) airtight  
Construction through a small but handy leak  
Of subjectivity. No inner light  
For us old structuralists, no high mystique,  
Like Sartre's, of a freedom shining bright  
With existential promise through that freak  
Of nature, human choice. Hail the White Knight  
Who comes (though often by the most oblique  
Or complex ways around) to wing our flight  
From the iron grip of causal laws that wreak  
Destruction on our human will to slight  
Mere circumstance and end the losing streak  
We suffered as if fate had fixed the fight.

My point: that structuralism helped us see  
Beyond that Sartrean fix by letting go,  
Once and for all, the thought of subjects 'free'  
In the sense 'really, deep down, prone to no  
Impediments of kind or of degree  
To their free choice: 'defend the status quo  
Or strive against it!'

That's the reason we  
Took language as our model, or – you know  
The story well enough – the master-key







Of structural linguistics. This we owe  
To Saussure, Jakobson and company,  
Plus Althusser who managed to bestow  
On Marx a reading that could claim to be  
Both rigorous and well equipped to show  
Our own conjuncture with the clarity  
Such thinking brings. The syntagmatic flow  
Of speech is like the combinatory  
Of actions and events, an ordered row  
That bears the mark of willing agency,  
Whether to hold in place or overthrow  
Such order. Yet it shows unconsciously –  
So structuralists maintain – the *sous-niveau*  
Of differences and contrasts that decree  
How speech or actions signify although  
The speaker, like the agent, won't agree  
That what they've said or done makes sense on so  
Arcane a set of terms.



Think: why should she,  
The militant, however street-wise, grow  
Conversant with depth-codes of strategy,  
Or speaker venture nothing till, below

The surface utterance, he too can trace  
The signifying systems that elude  
Our conscious grasp? For else they'd slow the pace  
Of speech, or thought, or action, and preclude  
All access to the generative space  
Where subjects somehow find the aptitude  
For words and acts that promise to displace  
The ideologies that once subdued

## Poetry

All stirrings of revolt. So we gave chase  
To errant signifiers, or pursued  
Those fleeting signs – exposed to us by grace  
Of Marx and Freud, plus insights late accrued  
From Althusser and Lacan – that the case  
Is not at all as it's naively viewed  
By those who take our words and deeds at face  
Acceptance but, more tellingly construed,  
Half-yields to ideology's embrace  
Yet kicks against it.

Hence the multitude  
Of symptoms that would promptly self-erase  
At its behest if not for us, the brood  
Of old-school structuralists who opt to base  
Our strategies and methods on a clued-  
Up symptom-reader's grasp. This shuns the race  
From thought to deed, reminds us what ensued  
In '68, and bids we play our ace  
Card to warn just how easily a mood  
Of premature euphoria takes the place  
That, we say, falls more aptly to a shrewd  
Since theory-guided project to retrace  
The structural constraints that had us screwed.





# The *Wednesday* Books

## Volume 1 & 2 in Print Now

### Limited Edition

We are pleased to announce the publication of the first two volumes of **The *Wednesday*** in a book form. The two volumes cover the first six months. Volume one included twelve issues (1-12) plus the experimental issue; issue no. zero. Volume two includes another twelve issues (13 – 24). The issues represent the journey so far and we are pleased with this achievement. The volumes are printed by The Wednesday Press, Oxford.

We are grateful to all the writers, poets and artists who contributed throughout. Special thanks to Dennis Harrison who supported the magazine since the experimental issue and hosted the Wednesday group until the closure of his Albion Beatnik Bookstore. But Dennis is still a great supporter of the magazine and the group and we will stand by him in his future endeavours in the cultural sphere.

*The Editor*

*To obtain your copy of volume one or volume two, please send a signed cheque with your name and address on the back for £15 (or £30 for both) inside the UK or £18 (or £36 for both) for readers outside the UK to:*

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Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

## Together

Sky-born we looked at the world,  
you and I, at the same time  
each glance was a renewal,

but now, after time passed,  
we fell into a loss of dream,  
you and I,

Let us ignore what we became  
at daybreak, night unlocked  
into locked days,  
high plains led to the abyss.

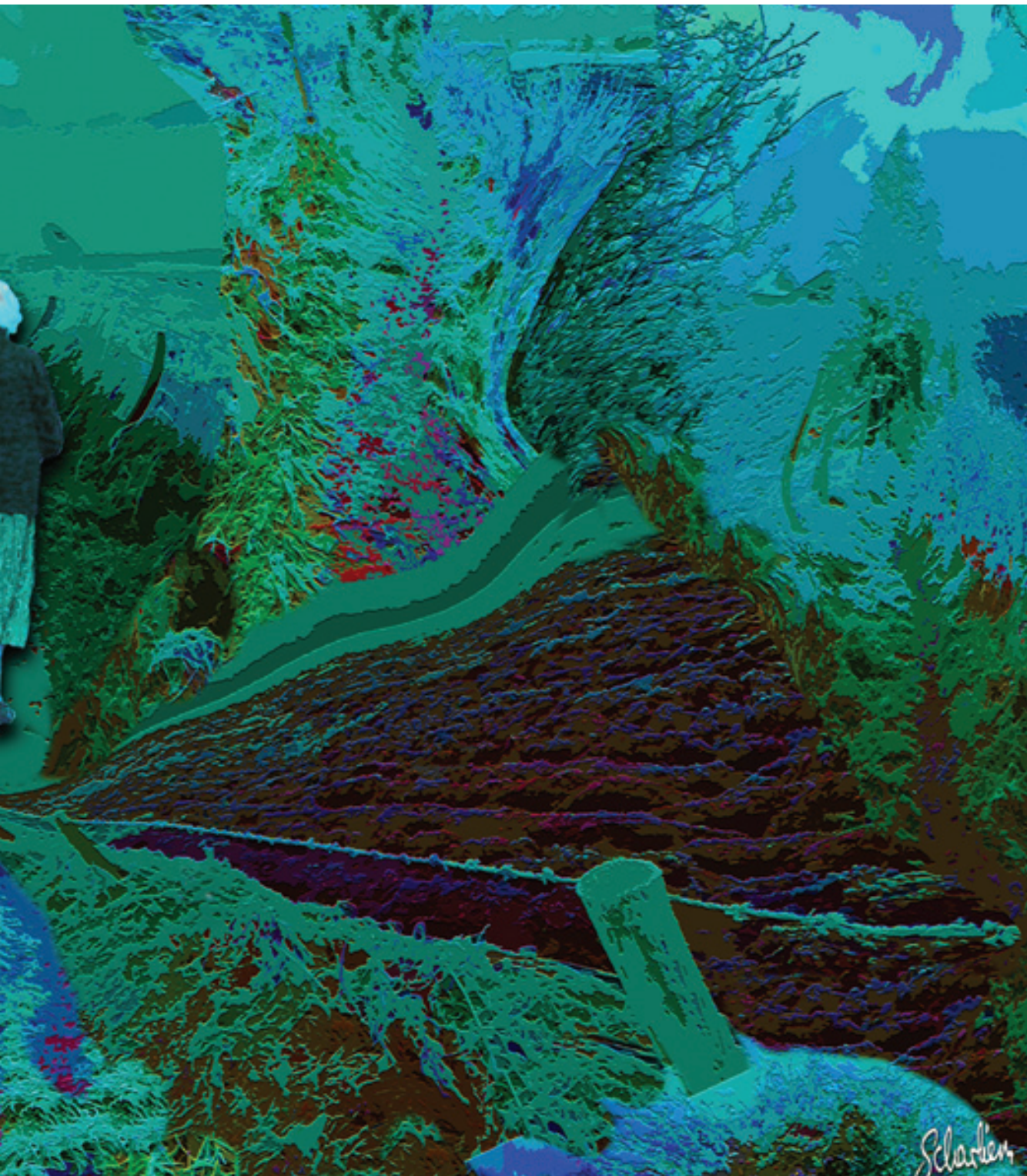
Stars still shine  
on the sweet orbits of love,  
when clouds move  
in the clear light,  
like poetry and freedom  
leaning in from space,

where everything advances  
and grows in that wild wind,  
that lifts, tears apart and  
increases us more and more...

I never knew, what I know now,  
never knew, *how* and *where*,  
but neither  
*until when* and *what for*...







# Belief and Knowledge: Philosophy's Basic Concepts

by DAVID JONES and PETER STEPHENSON

**T**he difference between a belief which can be called a mere opinion and a belief that qualifies as knowledge is explored in the dialogue by Plato called *Theaetetus*. The participants of the dialogue agree that an opinion must be 'true' for it to qualify as knowledge. If the opinion turned out to be false we would not regard it to have been knowledge.

It is necessary that a belief be true for it to be knowledge. However, true belief is still not sufficient for knowledge. Something else is needed. This extra something appears to come in two forms, both of which are connected with consistency, or coherence. For example, a particular true-belief must be consistent with some relevant more general network of understanding which is either that of the personal understanding of the particular believer-knower, or else is judged to be consistent with the particular believer-knower's own belief about the general ways of understanding of the community of believer-knowers that he or she wishes to participate in discourse with and be approved by. Such consistency relations are called 'justification' in the theory of knowledge.

The first type of justification is connected to the way that individuals maintain their own unified theory-of-the-world. When something unknown is observed, like a magic trick, the observer is not satisfied until the unknown thing has been understood. Each new item of experience must be rationally integrated into the general way of understanding the world.

The second type of justification is perhaps an illusion of knowledge because it involves

a judgement of consistency without personal understanding. This occurs when a belief is regarded as knowledge because it is consistent with statements made by an authority whose expertise one takes on trust. Being aware that some other person has beliefs and behaves as if he or she definitely understands them is quite different to having oneself an understanding of a means of justification. For example, knowing that a heart surgeon has a successful record of operations is a completely different kind of knowledge to the kind through which the surgeon is successful. Going with the herd because the herd is going is quite different to knowing where one is going oneself.

Distinctions can thus be made between having a belief and having knowledge. It is clear that, contrary to frequent usage, belief and knowledge are not mutually exclusive. This is because knowledge actually requires belief. The belief must also be true and the true-belief must be justifiable with a reasoned understanding or account. Each of the three conditions are necessary for knowledge.

It has been noticed since Plato wrote *Theaetetus* that someone can have a 'reasonable account' in which the justification itself is false or illusory. In this case the ascription of 'knowledge' would seem to have been wrongly made. An example of an 'illusory justification' might be the case of someone who walks past a broken clock at the same time each day and, from seeing other clocks immediately before and after, believes that he has verified for himself that the clock is working correctly when in fact it has displayed that very time and none other for many years. It just happened to be the precise time at which he was observing it.



## Obituary



Mr Patrick Baylis

The authors of this article wish to dedicate it to the memory of Mr Patrick Edmund Trevor Baylis (9<sup>th</sup> August 1927 – 25<sup>th</sup> March 2018) who was a great member of a study community which works from the original texts of Plato and Aristotle in monthly meetings. He attended these until just a few weeks before his death.

Patrick was a philosopher in the true sense of the word - a lover of wisdom. Although a scientist (pure chemistry) by training, Patrick also studied all branches of the arts, indeed to formal degree level. After retirement, he decided he should keep his brain active through study and took classes in Oxford in such varied subjects as Chaucer in Middle English, the poet Emily Dickinson and vernacular architecture of the Thames Valley. He also found time to ride the family horse and walk the family dog!

Patrick's life and curiosity sums up what it is to be a philosopher ... to think and discuss what it means to be human with all its frailties and achievements.

## *The Wednesday*

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**Website:** Currently unavailable

**Published by:**

The Wednesday Press, Oxford

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*Edith Cavell*



**Did you write those words knowing you would fall?**

**Were you really brave beyond your country's call?**

**That grim morning before the Kaiser's steel'**

**Was your frail body strong when death was real?**

**They've boarded up your statue to clean it today.**

**Still thousands will not see you as they pass this way.**

**What you said then we're now free to ignore**

**Patriotism is not enough, nor was it before.**

*David BurrIDGE*