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The *Wednesday*

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Editorial

Reflections on the Ground

The theme of reflection of the self on its ground was first raised by the mystics and then taken up by philosophers. The German philosophical tradition has a remarkable concern with mysticism in a way that is not found, say, in the English tradition, apart perhaps from the Cambridge Platonists. One of the Cambridge Platonist, Ralph Cudworth, had some influence on the German Romantics.

The relationship between mysticism and philosophy takes the form of continuity, influence and confrontation. In a series of Seminars on Materialism in German Thought organised by Dr. Johan Siebers, the starting point was the study of the work of Jacob Bohme. A recent book on early Schelling has emphasised the influence of the mystic Philipp Hahn on the formation of his philosophy. This influence was as important as Plato's Timaeus. Novalis was influenced by the Neoplatonist Hemsterhuis.

Both mystics and philosophers reflect on the ground of their knowledge. Reflection takes the active form in philosophy because the philosopher is trying to give a conceptual account of experience. The mystic documents what happens in the experience, not by questioning it but by submitting to it. We may have another occasion to compare this with some of Heidegger's thought, especially in their relation to Buddhist mystical thought.

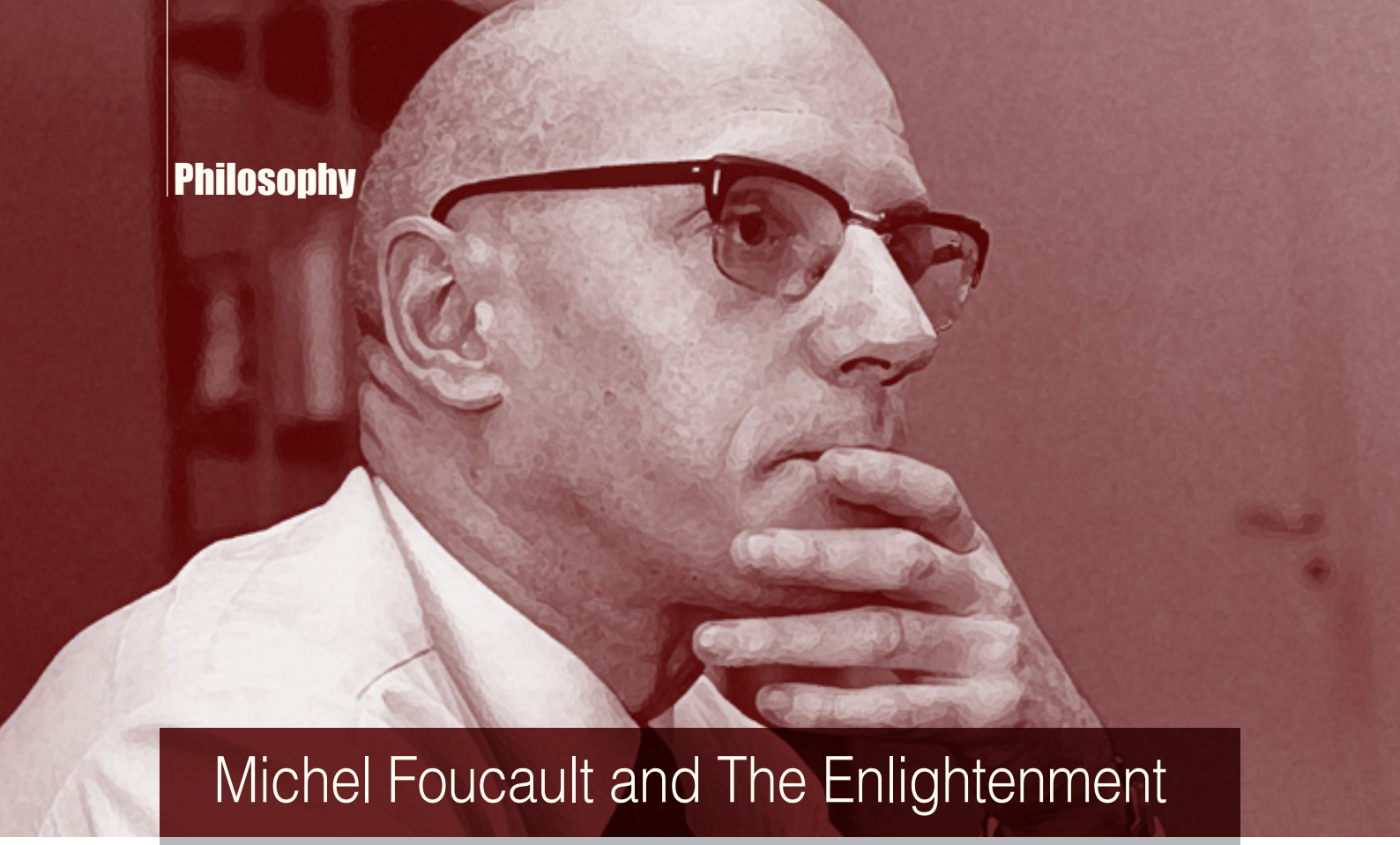
The mystics talk in parables and poetic images but underlying these stories and images is the self reflecting on its ground. In his book *The Conference of Birds*, Attar present us with a frame-story where the main story is of birds of all sorts meeting to discuss where could they find a king to rule their kingdom. They come to know of such a king in a distant land and they set out on a journey. Many other small stories take place within this journey. Some of the stories are narrated from past events and individuals, others are trials they themselves go through to test their strength and commitments. The number of the birds that survive this journey is thirty birds. The word 'thirty' in Persian is the name for a mythical bird (*Simorgh*). When they are finally admitted to the chamber of the simorgh they don't see anything but themselves.

Ibn Arabi says that when one looks into the mirror of the Divine one sees only his own image and never the Divine, and when the Divine looks into the mirror of the human He sees His Names and the manifestation of their properties. We find the same idea in Meister Eckhart when he talks about the soul's union with God as being like the 'dialogue' between a person and his image in a mirror.

The mystic Jami gives a nice image from the Divine's point of view: *'There was only the Beloved Woman, looking into/ A myriad of mirrors put in front of Her/ Each of these mirrors reflected Her face,/ In different grades of clarity and pureness.'* Rumi makes a similar point when he says: 'We are the mirror as well as the face in it.'

Ibn Arabi, in *The Gemstones of Wisdom*, presents a picture in which the mirror (= the universe) was not reflecting God's image and Adam was created to provide this mirror. But this is no mere reflection. It has to be a mirror of consciousness and knowledge. If there is no knowledge, then there will be a mechanical reflection that will not be registered and the experience will be lost on the individual experiencing it, as well as not satisfying to God. One should always remember the prayer stated in the Quran: 'And say, O God increase me in knowledge.'

The Editor



Michel Foucault and The Enlightenment

Foucault talked about the Enlightenment on several occasions, most famously in his commentary on Kant's essay on the subject. But Kant and Foucault lived in different time and faced different challenges. What does Enlightenment mean to each of them? How is the question relevant to our time?

DAVID SOLOMON

Michel Foucault wrote '*What is Enlightenment?*' shortly before his death in 1984. It was unpublished in his lifetime and found among documents. It is partly a commentary on Kant's essay of the same name, written exactly two centuries previously, partly a consideration of modernity as it had emerged in the succeeding period. In Foucault's 1984 essay, he addresses a number of questions relating to Kant's original study, its relevance to modernity and the meaning the whole idea of Enlightenment might have for us. He wants to know in what way the idea of Enlightenment as described by Kant is adequate to describe modernity. What would Enlightenment be in terms of our own time? Is Enlightenment part of a continuing unfinished project that extends to the present in a way that is recognisable in terms of Kant's original project, or does Enlightenment have a different meaning now?

The key slogan in Kant's essay is Dare to Know. This encapsulated for him the age in which he lived, the age of Enlightenment, which he and his contemporaries characterised as a time of radical religious, political, and cultural questioning and independence of thought. Enlightenment was therefore also a duty he laid on his individual contemporaries. If they had the courage they would not, as he said, rely on their books to understand for them, pastors to exercise their conscience for them, physicians who would prescribe their diet etc. By daring to know they would become free and happy. Knowledge and Freedom were synonymous. Foucault situates Kant's essay within the latter's overall project, exemplified especially in his three critiques.

> *'The critique is, in a sense, the handbook of reason that has grown up in Enlightenment; and, conversely, the Enlightenment is the age of the critique.'* (Foucault: *What is Enlightenment?*)

Kant's three critiques of Pure Reason, Practical Reason, and Judgment set down his transcendental philosophy, whose aim is to describe the conditions that make possible knowledge and action. They lay out the ground of our theoretical understanding, the nature of our aesthetic appreciation, the limits of reason and the basis of universally applicable values. This understanding and these values are universal, and the process of arriving at them is also the exercise of independence and freedom, our 'autonomy' as opposed to our dependence on other authority ('heteronomy').

Foucault's own concept of the Enlightenment preserves Kant's emphasis on the importance of the autonomous subject but problematizes the latter's link between knowledge and freedom. For Kant knowledge and the way we arrive at it, independent of outside authority, is in itself liberating to the subject. His awareness of living in an age of Enlightenment and his characterisation of what it is and what it requires, have a close relation to his other works and overall project. In a slightly different way, this is also true for Foucault in relation to Modernity. To understand Modernity is to understand the various discourses of knowledge, from which networks of power and control are inseparable. These not only impinge on subjects but actively constitute them. The eighteenth century and the succeeding centuries saw an explosion of knowledge which include technology, as well as techniques of observation, control, ordering and discipline, for example in psychiatry, medicine, and criminal punishment. These have left their marks on our actions, our bodies and our very sense of ourselves. We are not, as with Kant, an eternal subject restrained from without, limited by fear, caution, conformity, but nevertheless original, universal in our scope and capable of liberating and recovering ourselves in our pristine identity. We are rather subjects that have been constructed and are the result of discourses and techniques of power, observation and control, which have created institutions, practices and identities. Therefore, the nature of enlightenment in our times is not the same as it was in Kant's: his aim was the identification of universal principles. Foucault is wary of universal principles or overall narratives, such as that as

Immanuel Kant

the advance of universal reason, as containing the potential of new forms of power and control.

> '*We must try to proceed with the analysis of ourselves as beings who are historically determined, to a certain extent, by the Enlightenment. Such an analysis implies a series of historical inquiries that are as precise as possible; and these inquiries will not be oriented retrospectively toward the "essential kernel of rationality" that can be found in the Enlightenment and that would have to be preserved in any event; they will be oriented toward the "contemporary limits of the necessary," that is, toward what is not or is no longer indispensable for the constitution of ourselves as autonomous subjects.*' (*Foucault: What is Enlightenment?*)

In order to understand the way that Knowledge / Power operates we have to adopt techniques of scholarship very different to Kant's search for a priori universal principles and categories. These techniques Foucault employs throughout his work on sexuality, psychiatry, and crime and punishment. He describes them in a 1977 essay called *Nietzsche, Genealogy and History*. These connected principles are archaeology and genealogy (of knowledge). If we are adopting

the approach of archaeology we are patiently uncovering successive layers that underlie the structures of the present, not wanting to derive everything from a single theme or origin but being sensitive to breaks and discontinuities. Similarly, the scholar as genealogist looks for the ancestry of an institution or a discourse in a multitude of practices, being aware of what is 'ignoble', that is what has been ignored and marginalised.

> *'Examining the history of reason, he learns that it was born in an altogether "reasonable" fashion-from chance; devotion to truth and the precision of scientific methods arose from the passion of scholars, their reciprocal hatred, their fanatical and unending discussions, and their spirit of competition-the personal conflicts that slowly forged the weapons of reason. Further, genealogical analysis shows that the concept of liberty is an "invention of the ruling classes"and not fundamental to man's nature or at the root of his attachment to being and truth. What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity*.' (Foucault: *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*).

What characterises the modern age is not the uncovering through reason of a human nature in all its innocence and self-confidence, but the invention of the self out of all the elements that we have inherited. The artists who characterise modernity for Foucault are the poet Baudelaire and the artist Constantin Guys. Their attitude in their works is not to present their own times in terms of a mythical past, but to heroize it ironically, that is with awareness of their own inventiveness. The ideal type of modernity is the dandy who, through an effort which is tantamount to 'ascetic' makes himself a work of art and in that sense becomes the author of himself.

> *'Baudelaire makes fun of those painters who, finding nineteenth-century dress excessively ugly, want to depict nothing but ancient togas. But modernity in painting does not consist, for Baudelaire, in introducing black clothing onto the canvas. The modern painter is the one who can show the dark frock-coat as "the necessary costume of our time,"the one who knows how to make manifest, in the fashion of the day, the essential, permanent, obsessive relation that our age entertains with death. "The dress-coat and frock-coat not only possess their political beauty, which is an expression of universal equality, but also their poetic beauty, which is an expression of the public soul-an immense cortege of undertaker's mutes (mutes in love, political mutes, bourgeois mutes ... To designate this attitude of modernity, Baudelaire sometimes employs a litotes that is highly significant because it is presented in the form of a precept: "You have no right to despise the present.'* (Foucault: *What is Enlightenment?*)

Charles Baudelaire

If we are the product of discourses of knowledge / power we have the ability to play with them, reverse them. For Foucault there is a constant shifting, reversing, and turning of tables. There is no fixed human essence. Subjectivity is a constant site of struggle. What has been marginal becomes central. He fully recognises that his own activity, that of the historian and the scholar, has an 'ignoble' ancestry, the rivalries and hatreds, the partiality of the archivist and the lawyer. From this

is derived the 'objectivity' and 'pursuit of truth'.

Foucault understands modernity as a struggle between the techniques of power and control that we have inherited from the past including from the Enlightenment itself. But also from the Enlightenment we inherit what he calls a 'strategic game of liberties', the ability to play with the elements that work to determine us, to reverse them, to make what has been made marginal in the production of our subjectivity, central. By these means we can attain to some authenticity and autonomy. In describing his own scholar's activity in the light of its disreputable origins Foucault is illustrating how reversal, irony and authenticity go together.

Foucault stresses the importance of not submitting to what he calls the 'blackmail' of the Enlightenment, that is of taking what it is held to mean ('reason', 'progress', 'universalism') and then being in favour of that or against it. Rather, the Enlightenment lives on in the form of a struggle between its discourses / techniques of power and control, and the possibility of subverting these discourses for the sake of reforming and constructing anew our identities. The Enlightenment as originally conceived was a period self-characterisation of a particular period of European history and culture. Self-characterisation also necessarily involves self-criticism, a search for origins and a call for action. The relevance of this moment to ourselves, is that we can do something similar in our own time, the succeeding period of Modernism between Kant's period and our own: Enlightenment as self-characterisation, also the drive towards freedom and authenticity, finding a basis for this, in our case not in universal reason but in genealogy / archaeology, the recognition of a diverse base and neglected origins. The project we would be engaged in would be analogous to the original one but would frame itself in different ways. It would emphasise particularity rather than universality and diverse origins rather than the single narrative of universal reason. It would be an ongoing project, but not in the sense that Habermas might understand it, as a product incomplete and not completely applied but recognisable in its original terms. It would have a different basis of truth, knowledge and require a different kind of action

A Woman with a Parasol by Constantin Guys

'These inquiries have their methodological coherence in the at once archaeological and genealogical study of practices envisaged simultaneously as a technological type of rationality and as strategic games of liberties; they have their theoretical coherence in the definition of the historically unique forms in which the generalities of our relations to things, to others, to ourselves, have been problematized. They have their practical coherence in the care brought to the process of putting historico-critical reflection to the test of concrete practices. I do not know whether it must be said today that the critical task still entails faith in Enlightenment; I continue to think that this task requires work on our limits, that is, a patient labour giving form to our impatience for liberty.' (Foucault: *What is Enlightenment?*)

The Pre-Socratics and Metacognitivity

Professor Nona Ferdon's article on the Pre-Socratic philosophers (The Wednesday, issue 42) raised interesting issues. The article below is a comment and an expansion of her theme by a keen reader of Greek philosophy.

LIVIO ROSSETTI

Nona Ferdon (issue 42 of **The *Wednesday***) appropriately noted, with regard to the Pre-Socratics, that 'the emphasis on their doctrines rather than on their language ... has obstructed their stature as true pioneers'. Since she also wrote that 'most doctors/psychologists (*of the time*) were committed to the view that all medical systems were of bodily origin and treatable by physical measures' and 'disorders with prominent mental symptoms (e.g. depression) were no exception to the rule', let me point out that the very first person is known to having done something of this sort was Parmenides. He went so far as to propose an explanation of homosexual tendencies as the effect of a problem that occurred in the formation of the foetus. According to him (see B18 Diels-Kranz = 19D49 Laks-Most) it happens sometimes that 'the powers fight when the seed is thoroughly mixed', i.e. that the two genetic heritages do not blend perfectly, so that two identities survive, a predominant one and a marginalized one. As a consequence, the latter reappears in various forms, often coming into conflict with the predominant identity. That Parmenides may have thought and written all that is a source of great surprise, but it helps us discover at least one more face of this polymath and, indirectly, encourages us to be much more curious about what these old masters may have discovered or begun to talk about.

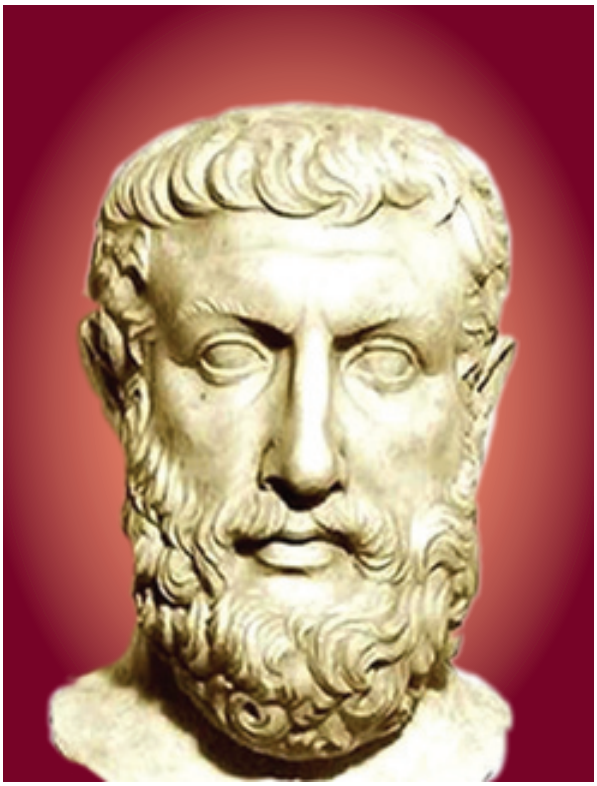
Returning now to the emphasis on the doctrines, we should make a distinction. Among the Presocratics there were no doubt several great minds who were probably fulfilled by what they were able to do and teach, for example by the number of very difficult measurements to which Thales devoted himself (this was indeed his great merit, and one may be surprised to hear that it is something that has been realized only from around 2008 onwards), or to account for reality and be somehow encyclopedic (Anaximander accounting for the whole world, but also Anaximenes, Parmenides and Democritus). By mounting a host of conjectures, explanations and theories, this group of *sophoi* certainly opened new horizons and, at the same time, looked for sentences suitable not just to account for individual discoveries but to mount a much more comprehensive offer of a 'learned entertainment'.

However, this was just one model, one vein. Other Presocratics – Heraclitus first, then at least Zeno and Gorgias – stood out for having insisted not on what there may be to be taught, known, and learned, but rather on what there is to understand, i.e. on how one should (re-)organize his/her mental horizons. In particular, Heraclitus made every effort to help his audience (real and virtual) to reflect on the criteria that are usually adopted and become aware of the need to overcome them. Even to recognize someone and deciding not to bark (dogs know how to do: B97 Diels-Kranz = 9D9 Laks-Most) exceeds the sphere

of cognition, because it is a matter of correctly evaluating a number of clues. To a greater degree, when Heraclitus claims that the god is day-night, winter-summer, war-peace, satiety-hunger (B67 Diels-Kranz = 9D40 Laks-Most), in fact he is elaborating a criterion according to which everyone could continue with many other examples, and if your examples are good while mine are not, it means that you understood the criterion and I didn't. And when he tells us that 'invisible harmony is better than visible harmony' (B54 Diels-Kranz = 9D116 Laks-Most) we are encouraged to move from cognitive to metacognitive, because invisible harmony is difficult to recognise: it emerges if and only if we are not superficial.

In these and other ways Heraclitus seems committed to do his best in order to ensure that we acquire a sort of clinical eye with which to reinterpret many appearances, to go beyond many hasty judgements and unilateral evaluations, and therefore to be wary of those partial visions that come to us all spontaneously but are not good, because they do not adhere to reality (and its complexity). More positively, he probably wanted to tell us that things and events follow their own course, have a logic of their own (called either *logos*, or fire, or *coincidentia oppositorum*, or *panta rhei*) and this is what everybody (or at least every enlightened person) should consider in order to understand in depth the complex reality which surrounds us. Indeed, he mounted an explicit opposition between *polumathia* (to know a lot, a feature of very learned people) and *noon echein* (to have an insightful mind), without considering the possibility that one person is both learned and insightful (B40 Diels-Kranz = 9D20 Laks-Most). To our surprise, he did not distinguish himself for having established this or that positive teaching like, for example, Xenophanes.

Zeno too, with his paradoxes, refrained from teaching (i.e. had no interest in concealing,



Parmenides

and then 'giving' the 'solution') and created several opportunities to reflect, for example to get people familiar with a number of innovative notions (that of space, or that of a 'ten thousandths part': *to murioston*) and learn to pay attention to what is so small that it cannot be perceived (e.g. seen, heard). So, far from preparing (and then somehow transmitting) already well-established bodies of knowledge, for him it was enough to launch ideas, raise doubts and make people thinkful: a pretty metacognitive aim, indeed, and also a pretty 'secular' attitude, since he has no secret wisdom to reveal.

There is already enough, perhaps, to conclude that the universe of the Presocratics urgently needs to be investigated with the necessary intellectual independence from Aristotle as well as from the masters of the twentieth century, and with renewed curiosity, as Nona acutely remarked.

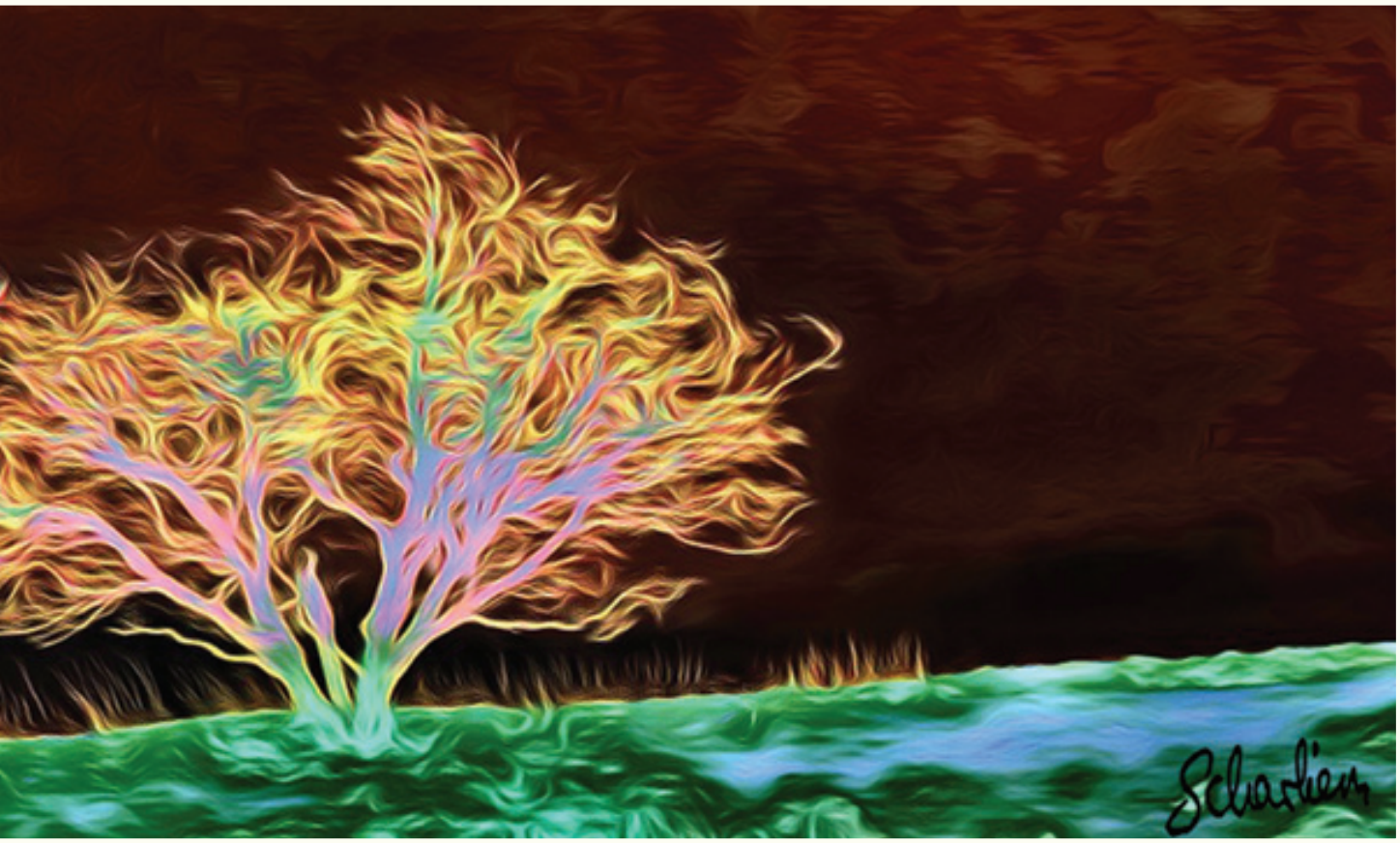
Ridgeway Dedications

I

Silbury Hill

Sky–born and timeless
are the songs of the skylark,
its white-edged wings visible
in flight over Silbury Hill,
where many pathways
and old stories feed off
the territory.

Earth huggers are weaned
at last by the muddy terrain
after the April rains, but now raised up
by the spur of light,
a yellow prong moving
out into dreams of loss and origins,
the cradling dark of Neolithic Man.



Ancient soil above secret valleys
of hatching grounds,
ceremonial circles
and avenues of standing stones
compose
Wiltshire's county,
filling forever with people and dogs
on vast plains,
where the winds are keeping
watch on the land.

Poems and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

II

White Horse Hill

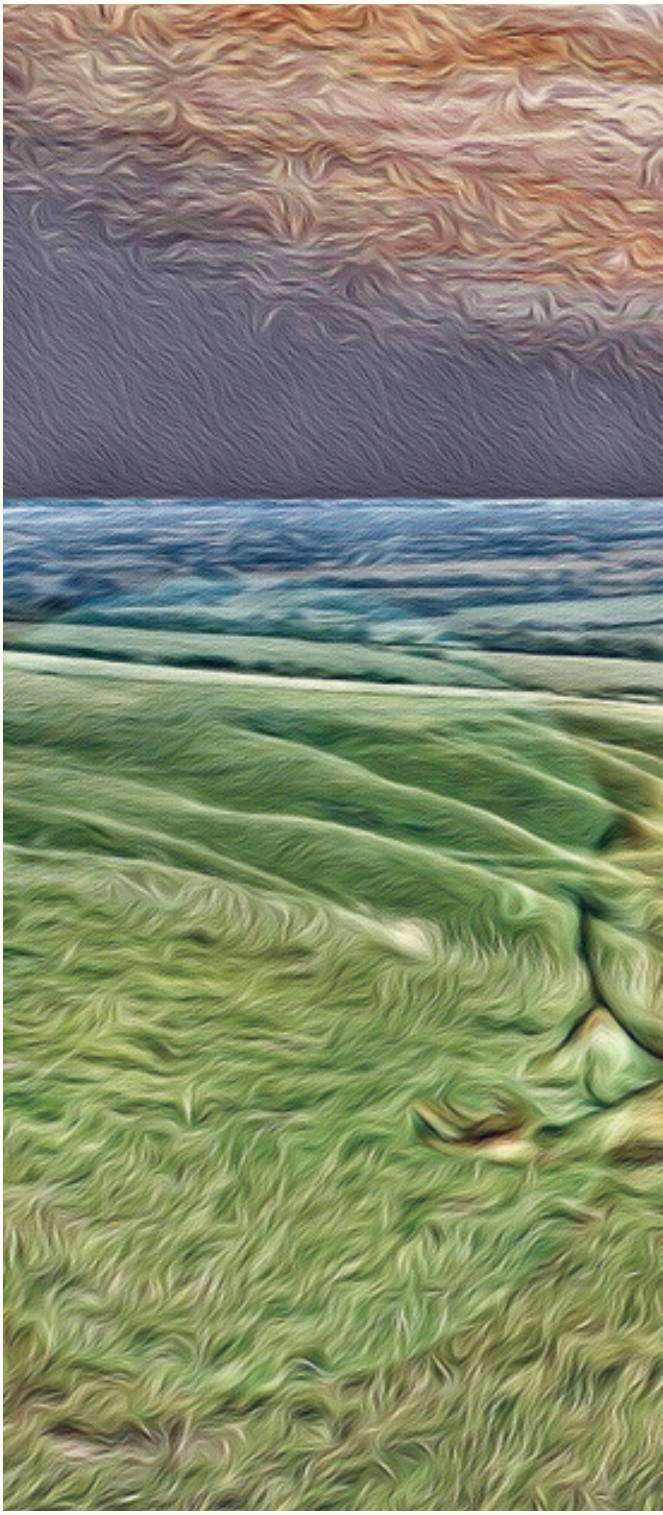
It is not as if the fields resent
years gone by,
not as if the foothills ache
for ease, or the clay paths mind
waiting. The White Horse is asleep.

Who will know
how much in the shade
from the past, the green grass
bent,
stumped, gone dead
under so many feet,
left and resigned?
Only the bumblebees
go rampant on thistles.

Moonshine is reaching
the top of the hill, the lonely
hawthorn tree, gnarled
by hundreds of years.
What does it know

of us, our times,
our polluted cities?
Acknowledged by winds
it accepts and reflects

aged dreams of battles,
life and death
to explain it all
quenching its thirst
in torrents of young and old rains.



Poems and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

From Individualism To Personalism

Modern philosophy focused on individual consciousness. But today there are powerful forces of compulsion to prevent individuals from experiencing the freedom of their individual personality, where the person has agency. How could a philosophy of a person, such as the one developed by Macmurray help us?

WILLIAM BISHOP

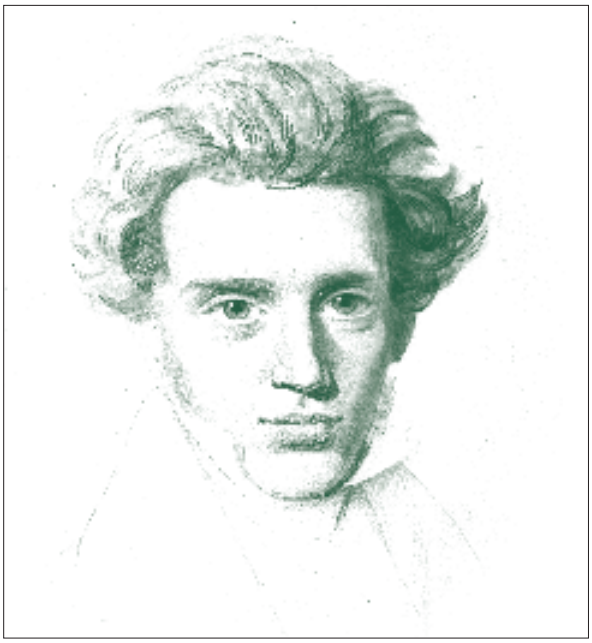
In a contest against doubt, René Descartes focused attention on the self with his assertion: 'I think therefore I am.' Whether or not the 'I' exists, it can be confidently argued that this humble term contains a world in itself. Prior to Descartes there is less evidence for awareness of individual self-consciousness, yet after his time this grew by leaps and bounds. The tendency before Descartes was to locate individual identity within a group consciousness, to identify oneself with the group.

One of the first individuals to significantly prioritize the world of the self or the personal world of the individual was the Danish philosopher who can be regarded as an early existentialist, Sören Kierkegaard (1813-1855). His essential interest can be characterized as religious and his main concern can be considered to be the single individual's relationship to the divine, or the eternal world.

A twin soul to Kierkegaard, yet of a different mood is Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935). This may seem a preposterous pairing and yet each man remained single and died in their forties. Both used pseudonyms for their writings not for the sake of anonymity but to express a worldview as from a coherent character independent from the author. In this Kierkegaard had the single purpose of exploring his subject. In the case of Pessoa he recorded his conscious and sentient life in the fragmentary form of a rich imaginative and poetic document. His writings constitute an evaluation of his personal world, as if to say: I may be insignificant, but I was here and these are my personal experiences and reflections. Both men lived to contemplate and write: Kierkegaard's journal runs to 7,000 pages, while Pessoa left nearly 30,000 pieces of paper in trunks found after his death. A selection from these fragments was posthumously published as the acclaimed: *The Book of Disquiet*. These journals and regular writings in effect archive the personal consciousness in the lives of the authors.

Kierkegaard's philosophical writing style is intricate and closely reasoned. Central to his concern is his statement: 'Science and scholarship wants to teach that becoming objective is the way. Christianity teaches that the way is to become subjective, to become a subject.' Kierkegaard's ideas are sharply focused as if by a telescope while Pessoa's reflections are more like fragments seen in a kaleidoscope. These refer to his own feelings, ideas and environment, encompassing a wide and rich spectrum. The character bearing the pseudonym, Bernardo Soares, bears the closest resemblance to Pessoa. It is Soares who shares the following confidence with readers: 'To someone like myself, and to the few like me who live without knowing they live, what

Descartes



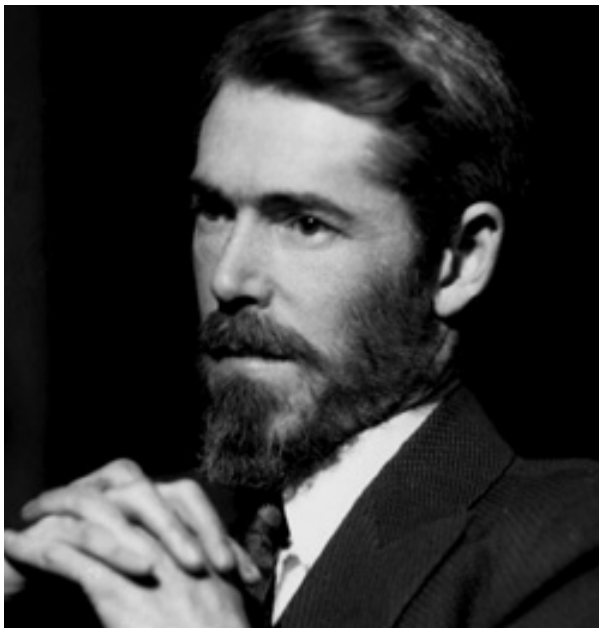
Kierkegaard

remains except renunciation as a way of life and contemplation as destiny? Ignorant of the meaning of a religious life and unable to discover it through reason … all that remains for us as a justification for having a soul is the aesthetic contemplation of life.'

This is an honest response by a person of Pessoa's temperament to the mood of the age he lived in. Indeed while Kierkegaard's focus on religious faith as a believer in God reveals existential angst and guilt, Pessoa's disquiet can be seen as arising from his loss of traditional religious faith and his sense of distance from participation in life. Disquiet is experienced in common by both individuals as indeed it continues today to pervade the existential atmosphere like an interminable hum of background radiation from the 'Big Bang', assuming there was one. We live with disquiet and uncertainty as the norm today although this may be reduced for those who have gained a harmonious relationship with the eternal. Today we are very aware of our personal world and yet there are powerful forces of compulsion to prevent individuals from experiencing the freedom of their individual personality, where the person has agency. There are habits that enslave and pressures to conform and situations where a person can be treated not as an end in their self but as an impersonal thing to be manipulated.

In contrast with and yet relating to the single-minded individual Kierkegaard, who broke off his engagement of marriage to devote himself entirely to his vocation, and the dreamer Pessoa, John Macmurray (1891-1976), was shaken by his experience of the stark reality of the First World War into becoming a committed realist. He was distressed at how the philosophical ideas of the West could lead to such a situation of conflict and devastation. This experience alerted him to the significance that thought plays in life. He realized that when the analytic-mechanical model of logic is applied to a person they can become seen as a thing, and when a model of organic dialectical logic is applied then a person becomes seen as a subject – subject to a nation, a part within the whole. For Macmurray the mechanical model of rationalism and the organic model of dialectical logic were inadequate for encountering the subjective self and he recognized the urgent need for an appropriate logical form to be applied to the person within society. To meet this need he developed a philosophy based on an early Christian model

Fernando Pessoa



Macmurray

before Christianity was appropriated by the state, where it eventually arrived in the condition where Pessoa and his generation could no longer accept it as a handed down tradition.

Macmurray's approach of 'Personalism' has been described as a positive that contains its own negative. That is to say, a positive emphasis is placed on personality, which includes the 'negative' aspects of mechanistic and organic logic applicable to the person as a physical phenomenon. Essentially, Macmurray identified the person as a self in relationship, based on the social self as 'I-Thou', exemplified in the mother-child relationship and in the activity of conversation. This social dimension of the self leads logically to collaborative community. He contrasted this with individualism, or the selfish self, which inevitably leads to what Hobbes calls 'the war of all against all'. Macmurray saw the self as an agent rather than a subject, and action as more primary than thinking: 'I do' replaces 'I think' where the subject-object division is replaced by action supported by thinking and feeling. For him ratio in judgment or reason applies equally to feeling as well as thought. For him all knowledge was unified in the self as subjective or experienced personal knowledge, which was also objective knowledge by virtue of the ultimate foundation of consciousness and phenomena supported by God.

Macmurray summarized his philosophy as: 'All meaningful thought is for the sake of action and all meaningful action is for the sake of friendship.'

As we progress further into a world of divisive individualism characterized by greed, and coercive collectivism, a practical co-operative philosophy of the world of the person can provide the prospect for a progressive way ahead. Philosophy and reflection, not to forget science, art and religion, throw potential lifelines to us to preserve us as persons from yielding to potential slavery in the loss of intentionality and agency in our personal yet universally valid world.

(To read more on Macmurray in The *Wednesday*, please refer to articles on his philosophy in Issues 0 and 1. Two seminal books by him are '*The Self as Agent*' and '*Persons in Relation*'.)

Facts and Interpretations in Post-Truth World

PAUL COCKBURN

Notes of the Wednesday Meeting 9th May 2018

The starting point for the meeting was the proposition 'There are no facts, only interpretations'. Perhaps the 'Post-Truth' era talked about nowadays is a matter of interpretation. Nietzsche thought there should be a variety of interpretations, and that this was healthy. However, it could lead to the weakening of social structures, and to nihilism.

We seem to be experiencing a lot of 'media distortion'. The news media can be selective with 'the facts', to make them fit a particular interpretation. Gerald Gaus thinks the philosopher's pursuit of the ideal is quixotic in the face of the modern world where diversity is key. We tend to build behavioral norms from the bottom up rather than top-down, and the media can mislead us by selecting 'facts' at a low level and play a theoretical power game. We end up with extreme populist 'certainties' with the middle ground being lost. There are many ways of getting from facts to values! Scientists can get to theories by testing empirical facts in experiments, and we can try to do this in sociological and psychological contexts. But these latter disciplines cannot be so certain about what goes on in the human mind, and the theories produced generally have a much weaker fit to the data than the laws of physics.

Another problem is living in the 'now', with no historical background informing the present. We need tradition, using procedures and behaviours which have worked in the past, to give society a structure. Our legal system for instance uses a social value system to produce laws which are modified in the light of historical experience in a pragmatic way.

In simplistic historical terms, we have moved from an ideal world (Plato) to a real world (world of appearances) - there is only a world as we know it and perceive it. But it seems to be human to look beyond what is presented to our senses, so we strive to get back to the ideal. We have visions of what an 'ideal' society should be like. But what sort of ideals, particularly moral ideals, will we be left with if metaphysical concepts are denied? We seem to be left with a non-realist eschatological hope. As we seem to be moving to extremes in the modern world, is there a neutral standpoint? How do we unite communities and nations in the face of such diversity? We have to be in dialogue and communicate with others treating their ideas seriously.

The Wednesday

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