

The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group at Albion Beatnik - Oxford

Editorial

Philosophy: Plurality of Views

There are two questions concerning the present situation of philosophy, one is methodological, the other is more 'political'. The first defines the divergent views according to their style of philosophy or their starting points, for example, the analytic, the continental, Asian philosophy. The second looks at philosophy as a complex network of power and knowledge. It concerns what makes a study of a certain discipline a philosophy and what determine a canon for what counts as a philosophy in the history of philosophy.

The first question is brought about by the feeling that there was a unified tradition for philosophising in Europe since the Greek, but it has been split up into what is known as the analytic – continental philosophy. But what about non-European philosophy? Analytic philosophy has a considerable influence to the limit that philosophy is becoming more and more equated with analytical philosophy, especially in the English-speaking world. This leads to a narrowing of the field and deprives philosophy from concepts and methods used in other schools of philosophy. This is doubly harming for philosophy, since the analytic tradition has less contact with other discipline in the same university or in the same country.

The second question is brought up by variety of concerns: national, religious, ethnicity, gender, post-colonisation, Euro-centralism etc. It was exported to philosophy from all these resources in the humanities, cultural studies, critical theory and post-colonial literature. Philosophy itself, particularly in the analytic tradition, seems to take the formation of its discipline for granted until recently where it has to face these challenges. Even within one tradition question were raised about the role of women in philosophy and the way their contribution has been marginalised. But it is more so in comparative study of philosophical thought that one becomes aware of the difficulties of imposing one style on all philosophy. Writing on the comparative study of Asian and European thought, Graham Parkes, refers to this phenomenon:

'A major source of resistance to both Heidegger's and Asian thought stems from a complex of prejudices to the effect that: the proper medium for philosophical writing is the treatise rather than any more literary form; philosophy must work with intellectual concepts rather than play with poetic images; in such work reason is primary and imagination secondary, if not downright counter-productive; and rational and logical argumentation is the only appropriate method. If these are taken as criteria for philosophy, then most of Heidegger's writings and the majority of the major texts of Asian thought fail to qualify.'

But Parkes is also optimistic:

'However, as the approaching bankruptcy and increasing irrelevance of the narrowest forms of analytical philosophy become apparent, there are signs that the Western conception of what counts as philosophy is gradually broadening once again.' (His introduction to: *Heidegger and Asian Thought*.)

There will be a conference in July in Italy to discuss this problem. The conference says it all in the title: '*Expanding the Canon: Transition and Transformations in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*.' It will discuss ways of expanding and revising the historical philosophical canon and the way it is taught in the universities. The European bias appears in the teaching of the history of philosophy at most English-speaking universities. This starts with the early Greek and then picks up with Modern philosophy. Neo-Platonism, the Stoics, Jewish, Medieval Christian and Islamic philosophy are all left out in most cases or marginalised. This raises questions about the basis of such periodisation. The aim here is to generate a spirit of openness and a plurality of views in the philosophical scene. However, signs of such plurality are showing up which is a great encouragement for the future.

The Editor

BODY
MIND
SOUL
+ SPIRIT
= YOU?

Who Am I?

An Examination Of The Self As It Has Been Defined By Different Thinkers

What is the self? How do philosophers and psychologists define it? What features of the self are they interested in? How could this help us understand ourselves and the way we lead our lives? We will concentrate on the philosophical views in this part and we will deal with psychology in the second part of this article next week.

DAVID BURRIDGE

Part 1

Let's begin with a quote from Jung: *By self we mean psychic wholeness, but what realities underlie this concept we do not know, because psychic contents cannot be observed in their unconscious state, and moreover the psyche cannot know itself. The conscious can know the unconscious only so far as it becomes conscious.*

If the self is a duality of the conscious and the unconscious, but the unconscious is unknowable, then perhaps we should just concentrate on what we can know; do know through our interaction with others. Jung of course made a big contribution to our understanding of this with his Psychological types; specifically, introverted and extraverted.

Freud structured the self into three distinct

interacting agents. *Id*, *ego*, *superego* (das Es, das Ich, das Über- Ich). Within this structure the *Id* is like the animal in us driven by basic instincts. The *ego* is the individual human in us organising thinking and reactions to the outside world. The *Superego* is like the authority in us watching over every move by *ego*, punishing it with feelings of guilt, anxiety and inferiority. I shall return to this structure later on.

How do I define myself? If we refer to Kant in His *Critique of Pure Reason* he establishes an inner sense and just as there can be appearances of triangles and circles proved by their visible dimensions, so we can observe (anschauen) our inner self. We are given this inner appearance: *I have no cognition of myself as I am, but only as*

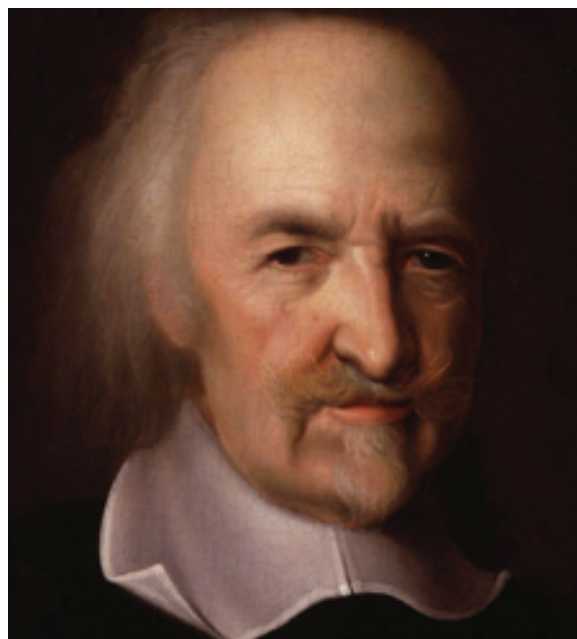
I appear to myself. In his *Prolegomena* he states: *The consciousness of myself in the representation I is no intuition (Anschauung) at all, but merely intellectual representation of the self-activity of a thinking subject.*

Which leads us back to Descartes's *Third Meditation: but what then am I. A thing that thinks. What is a thing which thinks? It is a thing which doubts, understands, (conceives) affirms, denies, wills, refuses, which also imagines and feels.*

We exist to function as thinkers and this competence defines us. But then what drives us to choose between selflessness and selfishness? For Descartes it was clear that there is an inherent goodness in us because we are made by God: *But experience makes us aware that all the feelings with which nature inspires us are such as I have just spoken of; and there is nothing in them which does not give testimony to the power and goodness of the God who has produced them.* Although at the end of the *Sixth Meditation* he recognises that we are very frequently subject to error. Clearly there is a potent journey for the self to find the right way.

In the opposite extreme we have the thinking of Hobbes. In his *Leviathan* he posits humans as little more than instinctual creatures dominated by desire or aversion (rather than love or hate). The self would in his philosophy be something to be controlled by submission to authority. An idea which regretfully has echoed down the centuries. To use the Freudian structure the ego has to be authoritatively controlled because the Id is only moved by basic instincts, and the Ego can only cope in a society where there is a clear authority over the individual self.

It can of course be argued that the self is happiest with things it knows. Hume argued in his *Treatise of Human Nature* that custom is the powerful force which normally will inspire the self: *But custom not only gives a facility to perform any action, but likewise an inclination and tendency towards it, where it is not entirely disagreeable, and can never be the object of inclination.* For Hume my self will be driven by habit or custom. Active spirits are



Hobbes

given new force whereas passive spirits become languid.

We need to turn to Utilitarianism to consider the self as an independent entity. In John Stuart Mill's essay *On Liberty* the central question is *how to make the fitting adjustment between independence and social control.*

The independence of the self does not just mean liberty from a formal authority. We are essentially social animals and the self is often under the control of the society to which he belongs. As Mill wrote: *Protection against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough: there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling.* So, if an individual's ideas conflict with collective morals then the individual's liberty to express those ideas will be suppressed.

The Superego would agree with: *The practical principle which guides them to their opinions on the regulation of human conduct is the feeling in each person's mind that everybody should act as he, and those with whom he sympathises would like them to act.*

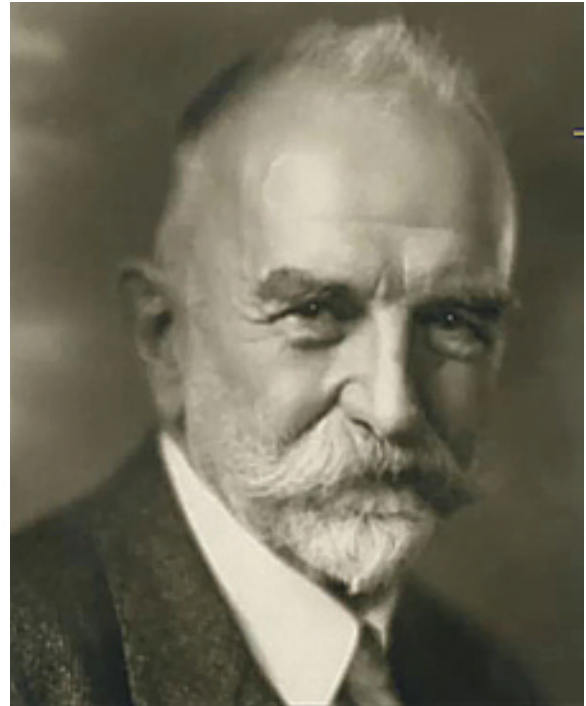
But the ordinary man, as has already been made clear, is driven by self-interest: *Men's opinions*

accordingly, on what is laudable or blameable are affected by all the multifarious causes which influence their wishes in regard to the conduct of others...

Servility to social forces of whatever kind is a characteristically extreme act of selfishness, or perhaps an act of survival and the higher order of self requires the courage of a virtuous agent. If I am going to take responsibility for the actions of myself I need to understand what the self is and what freedom it actually has.

Locke (in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*) would want to persuade me that I have an identity separate and free from the artefact of society, and separate too from my human beingness, which is a parcel of matter. Personal identity is what a person thinks and contemplates in different times and places. *Consciousness makes personal identity*, but the same identity is preserved despite constantly changing consciousness. *I say in all these cases, our consciousness being interrupted, and we losing the sight of our past selves, doubts are raised whether we are the same thinking thing, i.e. the same substance or no?* He answers that the self is currently described by the present thoughts and actions determined by consciousness. Having a consciously determined identity is a valuable tool but there is still the human animal to contend with, and all my instincts.

I prefer to accept that the self does not exist outside society and it is formed by its interaction with society. Language is the means by which the self can develop its existence and understanding of its place in society. To understand the self we need therefore to examine the methods of its communication and not abstract it as some separated intelligence. George Herbert Mead explored the development of the self in social interaction in his book: *Mind, Self and Society*. He posits that the self develops through social experience and activity and through social relations. The self can be both subjective and objective. The essence of Mead's approach is to explore how the self can be objective. He raised the question: *How can an individual get outside himself (experientially) in such a way as to become an object to himself?* To accomplish this, he needs



Herbert Mead

to take an objective and impersonal attitude toward himself. In practice he has to have conversations with himself before and after a social interaction. *How did they receive my opinion? Was my position in that conversation regarded with respect or contempt?* We indulge in these sorts of reviews having essentially conversations with our self. A classic formal review of the self arises when we are going to be interviewed. In preparation we would consider: What are my strengths I want to convey to the interviewer? How do I want the interviewer to assess me? Thinking about oneself is an inner conversation, which we all indulge in. It enables us to respond to our self as another would respond to it.

Mead points out that it already occurs in childhood, children invent imaginary companions as extensions of their games. Making up rules of the game: *Play in this sense, especially the stage which proceeds the organised games, is a play at something—being a teacher, a mother, a policeman.*

The inner conversation is of course a practice to develop the ability to respond or enact relationships

with others. We are seeking social experience and searching for the opportunity to successfully interact. The development of the self is through social interaction. The unity of the self is in social interaction: *Selves can only exist in definite relationships to other selves.*

Following Mead, my Self is socially defined, a far cry from a soul or psyche.

If this is the case I am (self) just an actor on the social stage with scripts prepared for me by society's norms as well as legal obligations and social duties.

To understand what *Homo-Sociologicus* amounts to I turn to Ralf Dahrendorf for an explanation in his essay of that name. Is it the case that we can determine the self by simply concentrating the social roles each one of us plays? We are actors on the social stage. Dahrendorf however comments: *The characterisation of man as a social being is more than a metaphor. His roles are more than masks that can be cast of, his social behaviour more than a play from which the audience and actors alike can return to the "true" reality.*

Of course, if we live in society we have social roles to play and these not only have appearance and character but also make demands on our behaviour and even involve sanctions if we do not fulfil the role standards. These sanctions can be either legal sanctions or social expectations. Roles are not handed out like scripts. We grow in to them or we apply and qualify for them. The expression of the Self might easily be summed up as fulfilling our social roles. Is the individual free to choose? *Is Homo-sociologicus a totally alienated man, given into man-made powers and yet with no chance of escaping them?* There will be societies that limit choice and conditions of poverty that limit the chances of the individual. How does the individual determine what he wants beyond what is offered to him? If he can and does then there is more to the Self than just social identity. Dahrendorf expresses this eloquently by referring back to Kant's thinking: *In the language of Kant homo-sociologicus is man under the spell of natural "laws"; his every move is merely a link in a chain of recognisable relations. The integral*



Ralf Dahrendorf

individual by contrast, cannot be linked to such a chain; he is free.

Before further examining the free self, it is worth considering the concept of *Homo Economicus* which predated Homo Sociologicus. Economic man goes back to the 19th Century and John Stuart Mill. It looks at man simply as an economic mechanism motivated only by self-interest. – *a being who desires to possess wealth, and who is capable of judging the comparative efficacy of means for obtaining that end:* (John Stuart Mill on *Political Economics*). Whilst self-interest has a place in understanding human behaviour it is too narrow to classify the self in only this way, because it omits the importance of all the aspects of social man and more.

Beyond social appearances there is 'a thing in itself', which we can realise within us. Of course, the problem is, as Kant pointed out, we never experience 'a thing in itself'. It is just a principle telling us that there is more than just what we can experience.

I think if we are going to examine the self beyond social stereotypes we need to understand what motivates us and what defines our humanity.

Reflections on Art and its value

Art is an essential activity of the humankind and part of its history since early human existence. It is an instinct of expression which humans follow and it gives them mental satisfaction and pleasure. We can ask ourselves: What is art? Why it is such a fundamental activity? Why do all cultures produce it? What does it mean to have a life dedicated to art? What is the value of Art in today's world? These are all big questions, and the article below is an attempt to give some answers.



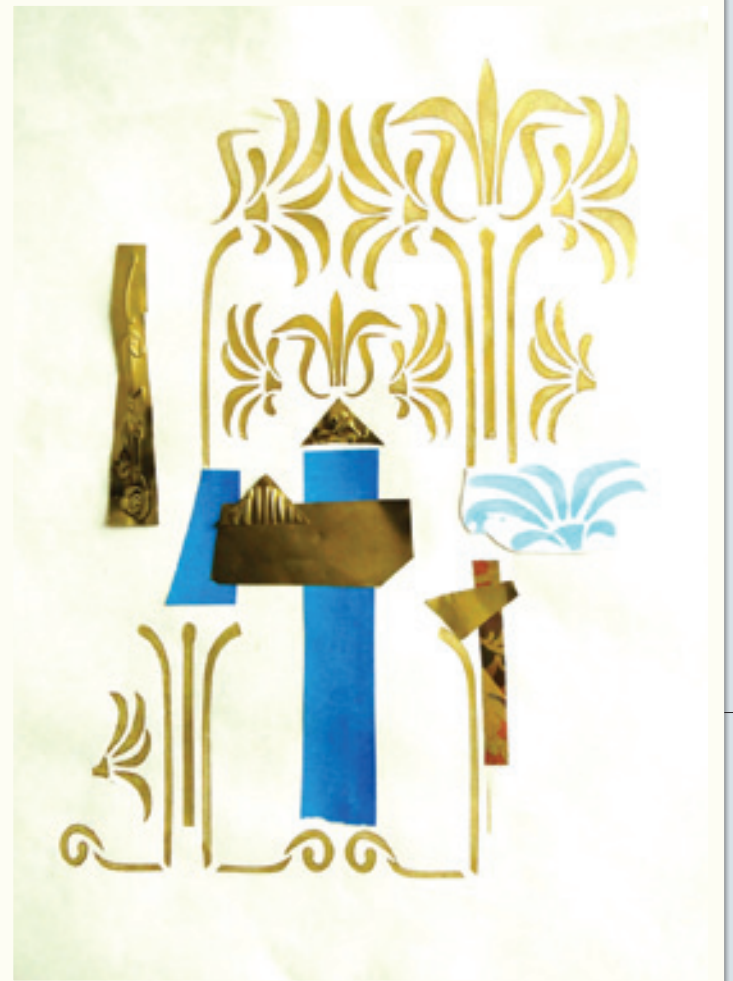
Art which has beauty as its object, has in it the necessity for human beings to decorate their environment and embellish it, perhaps inspired by the beauty of nature in its variety, such as landscapes, flowers, the human body and many more. We learn beauty from nature, with its written and unwritten laws, and we want to reproduce it, where colours, shapes and proportions are the founding elements.

But besides being an aesthetic function, Art is also a form of expression. We need to create beauty and express our sentiments. Man needs spaces in which he recreates parts of his life, for example the scenes of ancestral hunting

painted on rocky walls, as well as scenes of nineteenth-century life with moments of fun painted on canvas, as in impressionism.

Not only beauty and the figurative have been recreated during the development of the Art. Through artistic expression even the ugly has found a space, such as the grotesque, together with the tragic, such as the representation of wars. Thus, art has become a complete document of human history of the individual and of the community, before the birth of photography, television and the internet.

As mentioned, art initially used figuration as



Art

a medium, later and especially since the twentieth century, art becomes an abstract expression of human emotions and tensions, with the aid of colours and materials. The symbols used don't speak any more in a narrative way about a given topic but are reporting the subject in question in terms of abstraction.

The instinct for art also includes the expression of musical arts, design, literary and theatrical arts, photography and architecture. Every medium can touch a different point within the human soul, in all ages and in all cultures, just with the creation of different forms.

Sometimes we find archetypes with the same forms in different cultures, and this raises the conviction of common basic instincts across cultures. On the other hand, we can call art also the use of *techne* in an excellent way. There are artists of innate talent and technical mastery, but usually art is always accompanied by long and profound studies of technique. It was done in the past in handicraft shops and today in academies.

For sure, today the art schools where art is taught are important for the evolution of it. We can say that we never saw so many styles of art and so many artists in past history compared to today. This is because our society today is generally more wealthy, and many young people opt for art studies with the support of their family.

Art fairs, art galleries, art festivals, biennials, and museums are filled with ancient, modern and contemporary art. The 'image' is a huge business in contemporary society. Art moves people who love to travel, and it is considered a major attraction everywhere in the world. Art



is, and it was in the past, a way of investment for the rich who buy it, or a way to show their wealth. But it is also a sign of their attention to culture in their choice of art. Art could be a status symbol, but many cities are using it also to generate interest in their cultural value. We can speak for example of Berlin that since the year 2000 has been booming. The boom is helped by art and the huge number of artists who are living there. Or think about the case of Louvre in Abu Dhabi that is using this worldwide famous brand for tourism but also for local didactic purposes. St. Ives, a remote place in the west of England, became a big tourist attraction because of the number of



galleries and artists residing there. Art is a way of distraction but it also includes education and entertainment for the population at the same time. It is created with many contents, from social activism to pure self-expression. There is a certain kind of art for every art lover. A good and adequate way to understand art today is to visit big art fairs, such as Art Basel or Freeze in London or the Biennials.

There it becomes immediately visible how

much it is important in today's world to have an international dimension at these events and how they represent a melting pot for a variety of techniques and forms, using new and old media. The quantity and variety of contemporary art pieces are a clear sign of the fluidity of our society, citing the definition of Zygmund Bauman, and his idea of continuous change. Every artist has to find his or her own place in this huge market which is very competitive.

Contemporary art is represented mainly through galleries; the ones that go to the best art fairs are considered to be the better. Art no more works just on a commission basis as in the old days, but it is done freely by the artist, mostly unrestricted by the buyer's will. Since the nineteenth century, tradition has been broken, and it is still possible to hear the phrase: I could do it too. By contrast, an excellent academic technique is always appreciated, and it is a sign of the solid training of the artist who made it. Art fairs are always very interesting because they enable the discovery of art galleries in new and unusual countries, for example the African ones, or Vietnamese, Sri Lankans, Azerbaijanians etc. Often the new appearance of art galleries corresponds to new markets, and new open horizons not just artistically but also economically. Today, art and the art system are a mirror of the economic system too. It is a beautiful mirror that speaks to all aspects of human life, as only art can do, with a bit of detachment but also hopefully with depth and large meaning which are its irreplaceable value.

The Article and Artwork by *Sara Berti*

Self-Storage

I have a cold store
for my feelings
the unbearably painful ones
colour coded in red, packed in ice,
and kept in the deep freeze
for the time being
to retain my sanity.

I froze the amber coloured ones,
my many fears of conflict,
disagreement or disapproval,
stacked them out of sight
to defrost slowly,
to be dealt with later
when I am stronger.

The ones in green
that repress truths,
avoiding the risk of change
I hang near the door
like plaited braids of garlic chains
to ward off evil spirits of self delusion.
They are continually aired
by the cool breeze of reason,
a constant reminder,
to tackle them soon.



Poems and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Moon-Dust

During the glory days of the Apollo project, a young astronomer who analysed Moon rocks at a university laboratory fell in love with my friend Carolyn and risked his job and the national security to give her a quantum of Moon dust. 'Where is it? Let me see!' I demanded. But she answered quietly, 'I ate it'. After a moment she added 'There was so little'.

.....

What could it have contained, anyway, to preoccupy me all these years? A few grains of titanium and aluminium? Some helium atoms borne from the Sun on the solar wind? The shining essence of all that is unattainable?

Dava Sobell, *The Glass Universe: the hidden history of the women who took the measure of the stars*



**'OK, I ate the Moon-dust': that was my
Preferred what-of-it line when they,
The few I dared to tell,
Seemed sure I'd have lots more to say
About how marvellous it felt as I
First swallowed that mere pinch of grey
And powdery stuff, or dwell
On how it changed my life, the day
He thought of giving that wild plan a try,
Hoping the moon-dust might convey
His love for me as well
As making such a fine display
Of his love-prompted courage, witnessed by
His spiriting the stuff away
Like that despite the hell
They'd give him should someone betray
The secret theft and hang him out to dry.**

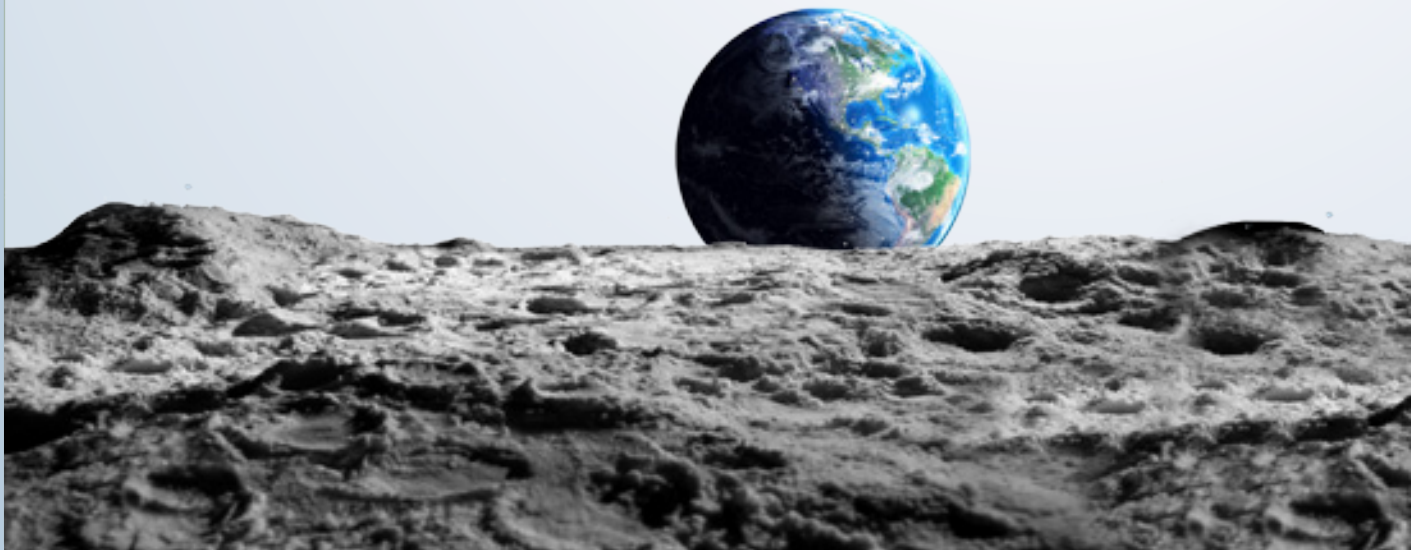
**I've read the book and think she gets it right,
The basics anyway, though I'd
Take issue with the spin
She puts on them. Quite bona fide
That 'shining essence' stuff, but does invite
The sort of OMG, wide-eyed
Response that's next of kin
To tidings from 'the other side',
Or mystic intimations. These delight
The credulous but aim far wide
Of his crazed stunt to win
My heart or my attempt to hide
All trace and feed my bathos-appetite.**



CHRIS NORRIS

Still I'd suggest her treatment tends to jar
By also making such a meal
Of that debunking stuff,
Her saying it was no big deal
Because the dust, once eaten, took a far
From glorious course to set the seal
On its quickly enough
Defunct career. Like the last reel
In some crude farce, or pay-off for the star
Of some crap film whose sole appeal
Is to the fans of snuff-
Movie denouements where they feel,
It seems, a pleasure-yield just as bizarre

As that which opts to picture my moon-dust
In alimentary terms. I know,
I took the opposite
Position a short while ago
And warned the reader: don't place too much trust
In all those moonstruck bits that throw
A somewhat over-lit



Stage-presence or romantic glow
On that old escapade. Suppose I must
Have stuff to sort out if it's so
Hard for me to admit
How odd they are yet apropos,
These contraries no logic can adjust

Since they're so frequently, as here I guess,
Twin aspects of a single trait
Such as the Freudians find
At root of all those old love-hate
Relations, and as critics like to stress
As key to texts like this. No great
Discovery, more the kind
You'd make, like me, three decades late
When brought up short and driven to confess
Just how far back it went, that state
Of feeling that combined
By lunar fluke in what I ate
And gave me equal cause to curse and bless.

The Wednesday

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Website: Currently unavailable

Published by:

The Wednesday Press, Oxford

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