

# The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group at Albion Beatnik - Oxford

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## Editorial

### *In the Company of Great Minds*

**T**here is a famous letter by Machiavelli sent to his patron and benefactor Francesco Vettori in which he details his daily life after he was exiled by the Medici. He lived on a farm belonging to his family at a village near Florence and frequented a tavern called L'Albergaccio (literally the Bad Hotel). He describes in his letter how he got up in the morning, to be near a spring while he read Dante, Petrarch, Tibullus, Ovid and others. Then he took his lunch at home, before making his way to the inn, where usually there were the innkeeper, a butcher, a miller, and a couple of kiln workers. He goes on to say:

'I slum around with them for the rest of the day playing *cricca* and backgammon: these games lead to thousands of squabbles and endless abuses and vituperations. More often than not we are wrangling over a penny...

When evening comes, I return home and enter my study; on the threshold I take off my workday clothes, covered with mud and dirt, and put on the garments of court and palace. Fitted out appropriately, I step inside the venerable courts of the ancients, where, solicitously received by them, I nourish myself on that food that alone is mine and for which I was born; where I am unashamed to converse with them and to question them about the motives for their actions, and they, out of their human kindness, answer me. And for four hours at a time I feel no boredom, I forget all my troubles, I do not dread poverty, and I am not terrified by death. I absorb myself into them completely.'

I feel a great sympathy with this letter, because it expresses the feeling I have every time I am surrounded by books in library, my own or any

other library. Sometime when I sit in the café at Blackwell's on the first floor and watch the rows of books in front of me, I say to my wife 'It is a privilege to be here.' She laughs and says 'That is only because you love books.' Other times when I walk around Oxford at night and the light in several libraries are lit I feel the power of thoughts and all the great minds long departed become living souls that one could approach and consult with.

I also have this feeling when I join a reading group, attend a conference or at our weekly meeting. I feel that I am sharing in a great mind that hovers above the meeting. I also feel peace and ease of mind despite the intensity of the debate. In Islam, there is a saying by the Prophet Mohammed that when people gather to study the Quran, the *sakinah* (peace) will descend on them and mercy will engulf them and the angels will hover above them. But maybe this can be generalised to all knowledge that aims at truth.

What occasioned these thoughts is that the present issue marks a full year production of **The Wednesday**. It has been a nice journey, very much enjoyed by myself and the team of the magazine. We managed so far to deliver the magazine on time every Wednesday morning with as good a standard as we could. We have also published two volumes of the accumulated issues and we are in the process of publishing the next two volumes. Messages sent by readers throughout the year were great source of encouragement and highly appreciated. **The Wednesday** was a dream and I am grateful to all of you, contributors and readers, who allowed the dream to become a reality.

*The Editor*

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# The Ideal-Real

**Goethe has a vision that influenced the German Idealist philosophers and the German Romantics. It is what the mind brings to the world. He developed it into a new scientific method that rivalled Newton and mechanistic explanation. It took several years before this side of Goethe was publicized. Credit goes to Rudolf Steiner who was commissioned to edit the scientific works of Goethe, as the article below explains.**

## WILLIAM BISHOP

‘In the beginning the earth was without form and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep.’ So opens the biblical book of Genesis. Then the first act on this stage set was the entrance of light. ‘And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness comprehendeth it not,’ says John in the King James’ version of his Gospel.

Light and dark are powerful experiences and readily lend themselves to metaphor. The plot now thickens when the deficit in knowledge, implied in ‘darkness’, finds expression in terms like ‘the dark ages’, or the ubiquitous ‘dark matter’. Indeed, the question posed to Job in the book named after him emphasizes this: ‘Who is it that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?’ We would hate to point the finger since if we do there will be three fingers pointing back at us. But we do try to enlighten our own darkness with whatever light is available and in so doing discover there is light inside us.

2 Such a discovery would hardly have been a new insight in the late eighteenth century at a time when Romanticism and Idealism in Germany discovered a novel aspect where illumination was interpreted as coming through the ‘I’ of the individual person. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) shed a particular light on life through his works of literature that embody creative imagination and penetration of feeling and he became notable for this, but his natural scientific investigations, which

he considered at least as important as his literary work, were less well known. It took several years before this side of Goethe was publicized. This came about in connection with an anniversary publication of the works of Goethe when Rudolf Steiner was commissioned with the task of editing the scientific works of Goethe.

Born into the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1861, Steiner pursued a scientific education and gained his doctorate in philosophy by submitting his thesis, ‘*Truth and Knowledge*’, to a sympathetic professor at Rostock University. His interest in philosophy started in his youth, reading widely, with a particular interest in Kant and the German Idealists to which he related his own epistemological work, developing it into a philosophy of freedom of the human spirit. It was during his years at the Goethe Archives in Weimar that he wrote *A Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe’s World Conception*, published in 1886. It is ideas from this work that are the concern of this article.

Referring back to darkness and light, it has been philosophy’s traditional role to throw light into the darkness of life, and the analogy of Plato’s cave is an example of the potential effectiveness of this illumination. Not only is it philosophy’s goal to understand the world but, in its early days as wisdom, it was able to affect the conduct of life. This is still possible and indeed humanity

might well benefit from continual re-invigoration of philosophy. It was in this respect that, in his mid-twenties, Rudolf Steiner started expressing himself philosophically.

It was when Steiner was editing the scientific works of Goethe for publication that he recognized the distinct manner of Goethe's thinking which characterized his genius. Goethe's penetrating, reflective thinking drew on intuition, a mode of thinking not unique to Goethe but in stark contrast to the norm employed in science. Because of his manner of thinking Goethe realized that he was no philosopher, and yet what makes him significant to philosophy is the living element within his cognition. This found resonance with Rudolf Steiner and provided him with an impulse to make explicit what he saw as Goethe's unstated yet implied worldview.

An example of Goethe's thorough scientific approach is revealed in his response to Isaac Newton's theory of colour. Newton (1643-1727) thought that the colour spectrum was contained in white light and just needed to be separated out while Goethe realized that colour arose when light confronted darkness (a conception incidentally held by Aristotle). Although Goethe's theory has been vindicated, however Newton's view still prevails in science.

What essentially lies behind this difference in scientific views is a fundamentally different way of thinking. Newton was a genius at theory backed by the intellect, while Goethe observed phenomena closely and conducted experiments where necessary, allowing the objects or facts of sense perception to guide his thinking. By applying a prism to a beam of light, Goethe observed that colour appeared only at edges or where light could blend with darkness. Indeed, he was well aware of the spectacular colour effects of sunrise and sunset arising from light meeting with varying degrees of darkness. He called this a 'primal phenomenon'.

Notably, Goethe brought mobility in his approach



**Rudolf Steiner**

to different subject matter. He regarded the scientific method of analysis of phenomena and their subjection to general laws as an approach suited to the inorganic world but found this inappropriate and inadequate when applied to the organic world.

The organic world needs its own method of investigation, and for this he introduced the 'Type', from which an individual entity emerged or had to conform. This represented a break at the time from the mainstream classification system based on the differentiation of characteristics by the biologist, Linnaeus (1707-1778). Again, a different method was seen to be necessary for the human world in order to meet the need of the individual personality and the self in society. This approach had to recognize spirit and qualities of soul.

While Goethe appeared to apply his cognition in an instinctive way, Steiner saw the need to clarify this and develop it further, for importantly the conception of knowledge held by Goethe and



Goethe



Goethe's wheel of color

Steiner opposed Kant's view that the 'thing in itself' was unknowable. This meant that in Kant's scheme limits were placed on knowledge when the 'scientific method' was applied as the only certain means of knowledge. For Goethe and Steiner (as for later thinkers such as John Macmurray) the ability to establish knowledge was a question of finding the appropriate method to apply to the subject.

Steiner stressed the part played by thinking in the process of cognition. The sense percept was seen as an outer shell needing penetration by thinking to relate it to its associated concept. We bring the ideal world to manifestation but it is subject to its own laws. The percept combined with the concept is the full reality for consciousness. It is reality by virtue of the objective nature of the thought world accessible to the human mind. The concept is therefore not subjective but lawfully relates to the sense percept.

The reality of the observed phenomenon is grasped in the conscious mind because the *idea* is the real essence of the phenomenon. Intuition itself is not only the ability to grasp the whole but also the

ability to grasp the essential *Being* of the whole. Whereas an animal is a representative of its species, the single human being is a species entire to itself. That is to say, the human being is characterized by a combination of body, soul and spirit, where the spirit is the essential Being that requires an appropriate approach to address it. A form of mechanistic logic suitable for 'artificial intelligence' is inadequate for grasping the lively dimension of spirit. While an animal is a representative of a Type (the *idea* of the organism), the single human being is the Type in a particular form: the universal in the particular. It is this dimension of spirit that yields the possibility for cultural activity and humanity's 'true communion', which is with ideas. Recognition of the spirit also grants the possibility of freedom: of acting from personal decision based on the harmony of the world of ideas accessible to individual consciousness. According to Steiner, true freedom for the individual in society exists where a person is able to discover a point to 'place their lever' to best employ their talent in the world.

Steiner strongly objected to the assertion, which is taken to be a priori, that our perceptual world

is purely subjective. For him experience of the sense data is initially free from thinking but thinking rapidly becomes involved according to its governing law. The sense percept is not knowledge, but thought transforms this into a concept, an item of knowledge. Although we have thoughts, thought operates according to laws of thought and not according to the person entertaining them. Indeed, this theory of knowledge leads to the idea that thought is the central core of the world: *'The total fundamental essence of Being has poured itself out ... in thought it is manifest in its most complete form, just as it is, in and of itself.'* If this assertion by Steiner is true then this is an assurance of objectivity within what appears to be the subjectivity of the human being, yet the situation will be different for someone who places the 'core of the world' in a Beyond ('the thing in itself') so that it is then not accessible to thought. For Steiner, the 'world fundament', which had poured itself out fully, impels the world from within. Its highest manifestation is in thought, and in this respect, the human personality.

This guiding power of the world gives birth to freedom: self-government through insight. Here we find the connection between the creative logos and light leading to moral intuition. The free person acts according to their insight into the objective thought world. There is apparently an inwardly sustained harmony among all thoughts so that when a person arrives at a state of mind where the whole thought world bears the character of complete inner harmony they can feel in possession of truth.

Thought can be considered an end product of a process, and in that sense 'dead'. What is dead (the concept) is perfectly applicable to a 'dead' world, but a living world needs thinking in the movement of becoming (a time process) since ideas, as essential Being, are spiritually alive. As individuals we are one among many, yet the world of thought is a unity. For Goethe and Steiner, thinking was the entrance into connection with the



Newton

nature of reality. Knowledge is the conclusion of the work of creation and what takes place in human consciousness (as light) is the interpretation of nature to itself. The mind calls into phenomenal existence the innermost compelling forces of reality, bringing to completion the world process. The mind is not a receptacle but an organ of reception for thought, just as the eye is an organ for the apprehension of appearances. Thinking perceives the thought-content of the world. Goethe: *'The Idea is eternal and single ... all things of which we become aware and of which we can speak are only manifestations of the Idea; we voice concepts and to that extent the Idea itself is a concept.'*

Finally, it is generally supposed that 'reality' lies outside cognition, but according to Steiner it is because this reality is first created within cognition that it cannot be found by means of cognition. Cognizing with his form of intuitive contemplation, Goethe was able to participate in the creative life and Being. By making explicit Goethe's theory of knowledge, Steiner enables people to experience Goethe's idea-creating cognition and thereby adds further illumination and life-content to philosophy for a brave new world.

## A Note On Nietzsche And Truth

EDWARD GREENWOOD

I think that many of the remarks on Nietzsche and truth in the editorial in issue 50 of *The Wednesday* were mistaken. This is not to deny that in his multifarious and contradictory writings (particularly if we include the notebooks) many injudicious and contentious remarks can be found which may lead to the claim that Nietzsche attacked the idea of truth. But even in these writings unpublished in his lifetime a correct view of truth can be found.

Some years ago there was a cult of the remarks in an 1873 notebook which were extracted under the title 'On Lies and Truth in a Nonmoral Sense'. Nietzsche himself never published these remarks and I think rightly for they are confused and obscure. Alan D Schrift in *his Nietzsche and The Question of Interpretation* 1990 was very influenced by these remarks and by Derridean ideas of the indeterminacy of interpretation and put strong emphasis on Nietzsche as a proponent of a sort of playful hermeneutics. He claimed that Nietzsche's genealogical method is not really concerned with 'the discernment of truth' (P173). But when Nietzsche claims that the belief in God is more surely undermined by showing how such a belief could arise and be maintained rather than by existence proofs and counter

proofs, he is surely claiming that the belief is false and so quite clearly using the true/false dichotomy. If he sometimes concedes in a pro-to pragmatist way that people may be happier in holding a false belief this only shows that he maintains the distinction.

The editorial draws on the much later notebook remarks published by Nietzsche's sister under the title *The Will to Power*. Here it must be conceded that there are puzzling remarks about truth being an enhancement of the will to power. But there are also many good things. It is important to see that when Nietzsche writes as in section 481 'facts are precisely what there is not, only interpretations' he is denying the positivist thesis that we just have bare facts and stop there. On the contrary, particularly in human affairs, we have to take the facts into a wider interpretative context, but that does not mean that there is no truth and falsity, that

there are no facts. In the area of morals Nietzsche follows the Greek sophists in claiming 'that all attempts to give reasons for morality are necessarily *sophistical*.' The Socratic and even more the Platonic dialectic on the contrary lacks real 'objective interest' and show a 'hatred for science.' Perhaps we can say the same of all dialectic including that Of Hegel and Marx. Earlier in section 141 Nietzsche criticizes clerics for permitting what he



Nietzsche





# The Logical Structure of Types of Moral Judgements

DAVID JONES

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There are several different criteria that people use to decide whether an action, or intended action, is good or bad. One way is to judge the action in relation to a rule such as those introduced by Moses known as the Ten Commandments. This criterion is called 'Deontological' and is misleadingly associated with the philosopher Kant who had a much more nuanced analysis of moral judgements. Under this criterion an action is good if it complies with a rule and bad if it 'breaks' one or more of the rules. A different criterion, which is sometimes called 'Consequentialism', is to consider only the 'outcome' of the action in deciding if it was good or bad. Utilitarianism is a 'subset' of consequentialism which limits the measurement of the consequences to usefulness and pleasure which are very difficult to quantify. A third criterion is called 'Virtue' ethics and is concerned with whether an action enhances or diminishes the agent's (acting person's) fulfilment of their potential for human development. This type of moral imperative is found in very many philosophical and religious traditions but is set out particularly clearly in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Students of moral philosophy are sometimes given

the impression that only one of these three criteria is true or right and are asked to choose and justify their choice with arguments as if this were a beauty contest.

Most people today would accept that those who contribute to governing a community aim to facilitate the human development and flourishing of the members of their community. When they consider new laws they focus on the possible and probable outcomes that would follow from the implementation of the new law. The community members (the law takers) demand that the new law be implemented fairly so the judiciary are required to focus on the deontological criteria for the application of the law.

From this illustration the three criteria can be seen as three logical domains which are nested such that the outer domain is virtue ethics and within the domain of virtue ethics is the domain of consequentialism and within that domain is the criterion of compliance or non-compliance with a law. This is because a law depends for its justification on the consequentialist purpose of the law and those purposes presuppose a shared theory of human purposes and development.

**Art**

*‘Words and Reality’*

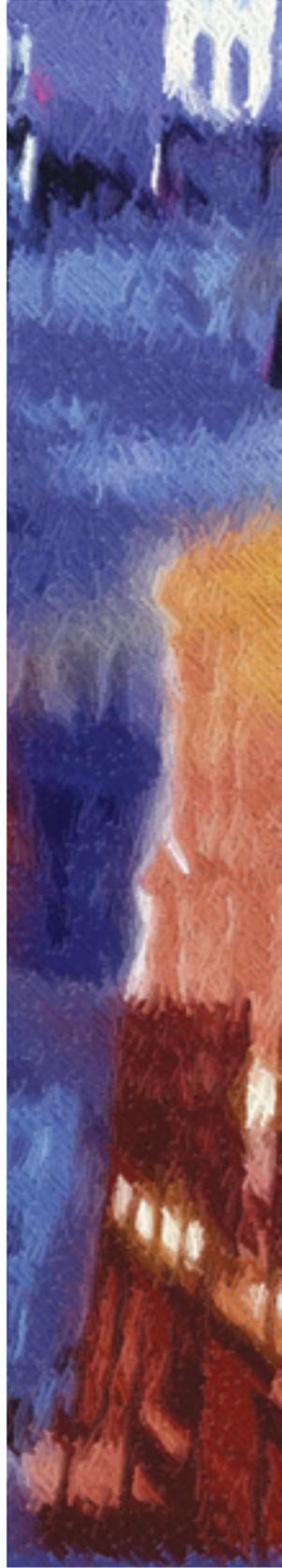
*by the Iraqi Artist Mohamed Mustafa Kamal*



### Lofty Night

I look out into the night,  
a looming darkness to warn me off  
as if I did not exist. The streets  
do not trust the street lights anymore  
for wanting to remain unknown and unnamed.  
In a lamp-lit window I see a man  
moving. When looking closer I am noticed.  
A shutter comes down with a bang.  
A child is crying. I watch a mother  
in the kitchen, hear the clatter of pots.  
Someone is singing, an old man coughs,  
reproachfully, as if he is wrestling  
with the world. A clock strikes the hour.  
I have lost count, never been able  
to keep up with it, never sure  
in the end about anything. Time warps.  
I have grown old in an instant.  
Buildings around me are rising fast,  
windows sending SOS light flashes,  
strangeness encircles me in a mist,  
narrow and narrower, catches me out  
in that lofty night and breathes all over me  
trying to devour me whole.

**Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws***





Read All About It!

Beneath the thunder of the city,  
amid the jumbled pavement push  
He was flanked by *shock/horror*,  
tough verbs to end the world,  
he sold copy to the suited herd.

Beyond the yelling strap-line  
was there anything new? The felt tip poet  
stirred a passing glance. His scrawl then  
guttered with the city dust, flirted  
with the wind in a beat-less dance.

Between the headline moods  
he didn't change his tune.  
Grief or joy, the same flat croon:  
through summer choke or  
when winter seeped through  
his kerb-scuffed shoes.



Now no one calls out, what must be read.  
Pavement mob is wire-tuned. They  
only grunt when accidentally bumped,  
otherwise smile at their held-up pads,  
sharing today's fake news, whilst humming  
in their heads their own kerbside croon.

*David Burridge*

# Philosophy as a ladder

## *Notes on the Wednesday Meeting Held on 4<sup>th</sup> of July*

CHRIS SEDDON

Half-a-dozen philosophers met on Wednesday the 4<sup>th</sup> of July on the terrace at the Opera Café, Jericho, Oxford, to discuss the concept of philosophy as a ladder. We heard that Wittgenstein used this metaphor in his early work:

*'My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.'* (Wittgenstein *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, paragraph 6.54)

and that his attitude towards philosophy as a trap of illusions:

*'What is your aim in philosophy? - To shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle.'* (Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, paragraph 309)

actually hardened over time:

*'I might say: if the place I want to reach could only be climbed up to by a ladder, I would give up trying to get there. For the place to which I really have to go is one that I must actually be at already. Anything that can be reached with a ladder does not interest me.'* (Wittgenstein *Culture and Value*, p. 10).

Schopenhauer was just one earlier philosopher to have used the metaphor of a ladder to refer to the attempt to climb above superficial everyday experience to access a transcendent reality:

*'steps on the ladder of the objectivation of that one will, of the true thing in itself'* (Schopenhauer *The World as Will and Representation* vol. 1, p. 198)

Those present generally recognised that much metaphysical discussion is in danger of losing



From left: David Clough, Rahim Hassan, Barbara Vellacott, Peter Wood, Carolyn Wild and Chris Seddon

meaning by over-generalising normal language such as 'How do you know that he is from Zimbabwe?' to supposedly transcendent questions such as 'How do you know anything?', but there was no general agreement that all so-called metaphysical or transcendent statements were simply part of a meaningless trap.

Some expressed appreciation for mystical language, which either helps them or others to go further in imagination than purely factual language does. This arose from a comparison between transcendent experience and religious experience. It was suggested that metaphysics provides the idea that there was a first mover, whereas religion provides information about the first mover. It was also suggested that the statement that life is grounded in mortality, not something beyond, was as metaphysical as its contrary. Reference was made in this context to the poetry of R S Thomas:

*'It is this great absence that is like a presence, that compels me to address it without hope of a reply.'* (Thomas *The Absence*)

and the belief that if God were not there, we would need to fill the space with a ghost, as Novalis wrote in *Christianity or Europe*.

A further contrast was suggested between philosophy which investigates but leaves everything as it is, and philosophy which embodies a true love of perfection by getting actively involved in changing things. This led to a brief discussion as to whether belief preceded action or vice versa - it appeared that those who favoured the latter did so on the basis that beliefs are a purely linguistic phenomenon, as opposed to a phenomenon often described by language. More generally in the context of actively changing things, it was questioned whether philosophy had grown more insular in the last forty years, and if so, whether this was due to fragmented technical approaches and a view that the only meaningful outstanding discussions should merely investigate fine-grained distinctions within a broadly adequate framework.

There were other brief references during the discussion to the works of Augustine (*Confessions*), Dante (Beatrice in *Inferno*), Hegel (the finite and the infinite), Kant (no proofs of God), Kierkegaard, Marx, Murdoch, Nietzsche, Ricoeur, Rosen, Schelling, Plato (Eurydice in *Symposium*), and Wagner. Those present felt that, pleasant though it was to be on the terrace on such a warm day, it was easier to focus in the cafe basement where we usually have a room of our own.

## *The Wednesday*

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# Year

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# The Wednesday

## Thinking Out Loud



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