

The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

Editorial

The Body as a Text

We discussed last week the body from the point of view of Nietzsche's naturalism and his claim for the primacy of the body. His picture is the opposite of that of Descartes. The latter gave primacy to thinking. The subject for Descartes is just thinking which is different in kind from the body. Nietzsche claims the opposite. The body not only gets a primacy but also does the thinking. It is also directly in touch with culture, evaluation and morality. But thinking, culture (for the most part) and morality are not materials. So how would Nietzsche respond to the question of how morality and religion might influence physiology (as he claimed) or how they might find their origin in physiology? Also, Nietzsche is a philologist and a philosopher who deals with texts and ideas. He intends his thought to change the minds of his readers, not their bodies. He was also a cultural critic and always called for the overcoming of the self, culture and morality.

These worries became a major topic for discussion, especially when Brian Leiter published his work on Nietzsche, which put strong emphasis on physiological determinism. For Leiter, physiological types determine psychological types. It means that if I (or the nation I belong to) have a certain physique then I am psychologically determined by this physique, even with regard to my type of thinking, culture, religion and morality.

The first philosopher to have engaged with this problem is the French scholar Eric Blondel in his book *Nietzsche: The Body and Culture* (1986). The book is very detailed and the argument worked out slowly and meticulously, but the basic idea is simple. The body is the author of a text and the interpreter of culture as a text. The body does that through its instincts (or drives). There are so many drives and they have their individual reactions to culture and there might be shifts and changes within

the drives and within the whole. There is a multiplicity and a plurality. They represent different perspectives on culture and reality. As Nietzsche put it:

'It is our needs which interpret the universe; our drives are their pro and contra. Every drive is a sort of ambition to dominate, each one has its own perspective which it tries to impose as the norm on all other drives.'

Reason, then, works on this text and gives it a definite interpretation which excludes other possible interpretations provided by the text itself. Reason hates chaos and multiplicity and gives a unified fixed form. By doing so, it does violence to the text and it is by nature one step further detached from the direct experience.

Blondel argued that the text of Nietzsche itself tried to capture the work of the drives through the literary devices Nietzsche used:

'inverted commas, *sperrdruck*, dots, dashes, anacoluthons, the world of aphorisms, altering texts with blanks, the continual emergence of the body. The body becomes a text: Nietzsche's text is as much a practice as thinking.'

Similar point was made by Chris Janaway, in his book *Beyond Selflessness* (2007). He argued that Nietzsche wanted to engage the drives of his readers through literary devices and educate them or win them over. Nietzsche does that through two textual strategies: the first is the contra, by undermining the feelings that created the given attitudes and beliefs and the second is the pro, by eliciting an effective inclination in favour of new ones.

The point is that is that the drives are open to education and this is the way physiology becomes susceptible to culture, religion and morality, unlike Leiter's strict naturalism.

The Editor

Embodiment and Intersubjectivity: A Phenomenological Perspective

The topic of intersubjectivity is also known, in the analytical school of philosophy, as the problem of other minds. But what about phenomenology? The article below explains the views of Fichte, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Edith Stein.

ADRIAN SHEPLEY

Descartes argued for the mind as *res cogitans*, a thinking thing with free will, and the body as *res extensa*, a physical machine-like thing, with extension in the world. The challenge for Descartes dualism, noted at the time, is how does the mind relate to the body? This is the hard problem and to this day we still do not have a set of bridging laws connecting the mind to the body. Furthermore, the problem this creates for intersubjectivity, how we encounter another person, is how do we access the mind of another, if all we are presented with is the body? In the wonderful world of philosophy, it is logically possible to encounter a zombie, which is a machine-like thing, with a physical presence which responds, as if it were human, but it is in fact without a mind. This leads to Turing's puzzle and on into science fiction.

Husserl's Phenomenological Response

There is a lot of confusion on what phenomenology actually is. Therefore, the first task is to review what phenomenology is and what it is not. Phenomenology is the logical analysis of what is present in experience. Experience is difficult to define, but it is the foundation, the given, the 'what it is like when we look within.' For embodiment and intersubjectivity we are considering how we logically interpret experience when we encounter another person.

Husserl begins by examining the logical structure of experience by means of a thought experiment.

People describe this in various ways but I will divide his method into three parts:

1. The *transcendental* reduction begins in the *epoche*. This is bracketing out the natural attitude. This is putting to one side scientific beliefs and methods, empirical and metaphysical stuff, about the way the mind connects to the world, and whether the mind correctly represents the world. Instead, we simply work with what is given to the mind in experience.
2. The *transcendental* reduction continues by setting aside beliefs about spatial and temporal features of the world. It does not say imagine space and time do not exist. This is a common mistake. It simply frees up the mind to existentially consider how time and space actually present in experience.
3. The *eidetic* reduction. By following the methods of 1 and 2 above, what is now present in experience is called the *apodictic* perception. This is pure clear experience. The eidetic reduction continues the thought experiment by working out the logically necessary and sufficient conditions of experience. This thus logically picks out the very essence of experience.

One last piece of information needed: - we can pick out *noetic* elements about the experience and what is involved in the experience, such as



Descartes



Fichte

imagination, memory, affective or emotional colouring. Also, *noematic* features; features of the object of perception, the image, the concepts and the analysis of the other.

Once we are clear about the phenomenological reduction we can begin to think about embodiment and intersubjectivity. For Husserl, there are three components to the self situated within the world:

1. The embodied subject, Husserl calls this functioning subjectivity. This is the way the self presents in experience, known from within.
2. The body as an object. This is the empirical self we observe from the outside, our reflection in a mirror or by watching our hand movements, and so on...
3. The physical bodies of the physical world. This is the world of objects we engage with, that have temporal and spatial location and causal properties.

The self we are interested in, in this article, begins with the embodied self. Husserl calls this functioning subjectivity. But remember in the background that for Descartes the body is present as an object for the mind. However, Husserl will argue for a logically necessary connection between the body and mind because the body is just an expression of the mind. So how is the body given to me in experience?

1. There is our inner awareness or perception, via proprioception, we are aware of the self in space and time.
2. The subjective self is always acting in the world. We have the awareness of 'I can' and 'I do', a sense of what is possible and actual for me. And we know what we are doing.
3. The particular way we are orientated within the world gives us a perspective that we are here and now within a particular ego-centric space.

For Husserl, functioning subjectivity is the

Philosophy

embodied self with direct awareness through experience. The embodied self is 'the what it is like' to be a person situated within a world. To give a practical example, we just know what it is like when we are walking, it is not a reflective act of awareness, but an experience. This is clearly different from Descartes' account of the body as an object of reflection for the mind.

According to Husserl, what is given to me experientially is not objects for the mind, and the body is not an object. What is given is experiential awareness, a sense of a lived body known from within. This is Husserl's functioning subjectivity.

There is, then, a fundamental unity of mind and body with a conscious experience, or awareness, within the unified self. Events that occur are given at once to both mind and body in a logically necessary psycho-physical unity.

We now hopefully understand the way the self is phenomenologically situated within the world, so we can turn to how we encounter another subject.

Encountering the Other

Before I move to Husserl's phenomenological account I would briefly like to discuss Fichte who as far as I know was the first philosopher to discuss intersubjectivity or how we encounter another person. Henceforth, I shall simply call another subject the other.

Fichte's initial question is how do I come to self-awareness? His answer is through the relationship with the other. The other is a reality check (*Anstoss*) to the self which both demands recognition and attention. This reality is the invitation to actively engage with the external world, transcending just passive experience of it. The response to the other is an opportunity to engage with our own existential freedom, we choose to respond to the call of the other and nod and say hello, or look through the other in ignorance. The sense of self is realised by the call of the other, which provokes a choice of response which facilitates our own agency.

When we recognise our own agency and freedom we also recognise the agency and freedom of the other. Initially, how do we encounter the other? Fichte says it is through gesture, a wave, a smile, and through facial expression. This is a remarkable insight, particularly for today where non-verbal communication is seen as key to relationship skills.

So if Fichte argues we encounter another person through gesture, Merleau-Ponty develops this idea to suggest language equates with gesture to give access to the mind through conversation. Essentially Fichte's contribution is that people are always in a relationship and so we are existentially free agents connected by call and response. Through the call of the other we both realise and define our agency and ourselves.

Back to Husserl

Husserl has so far argued for an embodied self, such that the body is an expression of the mind. The connection between mind and body becomes logically necessary. So had only Husserl realised it, he could argue for a self where the mind is located back into the body and the body embedded in a social world. This would be our experiential given.

In fact, Husserl's question is how do we encounter another, as minded subjects, and how do we recognise the other as a minded subject in the encounter? To put it another way, if we simply observe another's behaviour, this merely gives us an outward perspective on mere behaviour, but how do we know we are encountering a minded agent? (Thus, the problem of the zombie).

Husserl sets up the problem through the notion of a *horizon*. Suppose you have a tea cup in front of you. What do you see experientially? The front of the tea cup. The back of the tea cup has a rose on it, do you see it? No, it is part of the horizon of the tea cup. We can turn the tea cup around to verify the rose on the back of the cup. Husserl calls this verification the fulfilment of the horizon. Remember, the question for Husserl is when we encounter the other, how do we know we encounter a minded subject? Husserl's problem, as set up by the



Husserl



Merleau-Ponty

Cartesian legacy is the mind becomes part of a horizon which can never experientially be verified or fulfilled. Only you know your mind experientially, from within.

Husserl does provide his answer through another reduction called *genetic* phenomenology. Unfortunately, Husserl argues for a notion of the self which involves pairing with another, and this leads by association to awareness of the other.

The problem with Husserl's account is that there is a need to establish a sense of self as a first principle, and then only through association do we realise there is another. This means Husserl cannot escape the charge of solipsism. So, I put Husserl's account to one side because genetic phenomenology simply fails as an argument.

Edith Stein

Edith Stein was a brilliant student of Husserl and saw the implications of the idea of an embodied self, where Husserl simply foundered on the rocks of the Cartesian legacy. Stein realised that if the mind is embodied such that the body is an expression of the mind, then joy is a smile,

sadness is a frown, anger is a clenched fist and so on. The body's expression simply is the mind at work. To fulfil Husserl's horizon of the mind we merely need to consider the expression as it is presented in experience. Of course, there are examples of a deceptive smile, but we will know and be able to tell the genuine case from the deceit through our emotional intelligence and our capacity for empathy. In Stein's account, empathy is our capacity to access another's functional subjectivity through our emotional intelligence.

To conclude, to solve the Cartesian mind body problem Husserl proposes the mind is embodied such that the body is an expression of the mind, where the mind and body are necessarily connected. Stein realises the gesture is an expression of the mind and so a smile is joy and this fulfils Husserl's horizon of the mind. An interesting progression is that Merleau-Ponty realises the word is also an expression of the mind and so conversation becomes a vehicle to access the thoughts of others. If we combine Merleau-Ponty's account with Fichte's insight, a conversation is existentially open; it is an opportunity to express our existential freedom, our creativity, and to discover who we are.

Events



The setting in the garden before the rain



Some of the participants

First anniversary of The Wednesday Magazine Time to Celebrate

CHRIS **SEDDON**

In the hills above Oxford on Saturday evening the 11th of August about twenty members of the Wednesday Group celebrated the first year of this magazine at a garden party hosted by our Secretary, Paul Cockburn, with delicious Middle Eastern food provided by Wendy, the wife of our Editor,

Rahim Hassan. Retreating from the charming garden to the house to escape the otherwise very welcome rain, we heard how the magazine grew out of the weekly discussions of the group, with art, poetry, and philosophy from contributors in the area and across the country.



Paul and Dianne Cockburn



The banquet forced inside by the rain



Scharlie Meeuws reading her poems



Chris Norris reading his poems

We heard poetry from five of our members from their published and private collections: Scharlie Meeuws shared her tender and graceful perspectives on life and death, whilst Alan Price evoked those moments when the world suddenly and inexplicably makes sense; Professor Chris Norris dazzled us intellectually with his exposition of philosophical insights through intricate poetic form, whilst Erica Warburton dazzled us more sensuously with recollections of a childhood in post-colonial

India; finally, Barbara Vellacott, our sub-editor, read a poem by David BurrIDGE, who could not be present, expressing the appreciation we all share for those involved in the genesis and production of the magazine.

David Solomon led music in the drawing room, from arrangements of Bach's formal two-part inventions and stylised dance music for solo cello, to an improvised folk duet for violin and cello.



The cellist Chris Seddon and the violinist David Solomon



Erica Warburton reading her poems

Christ Church School Report, Lucknow 1948*

Platoons of gladioli stand easy down the drive
and flag the *maidan* where we drill
with all the folderol of Empire.
Victoria commands the gate
trailing proud stone folds.
Miss Jones reads aloud, with a cane beside her.

Colonnaded, arcaded, Solomon's porch
walks the building on both floors.
The kindergarten steals down
lofty corridors. Upper Ten
is distanced by Matriculation.
We all stand to sing the new national anthem.

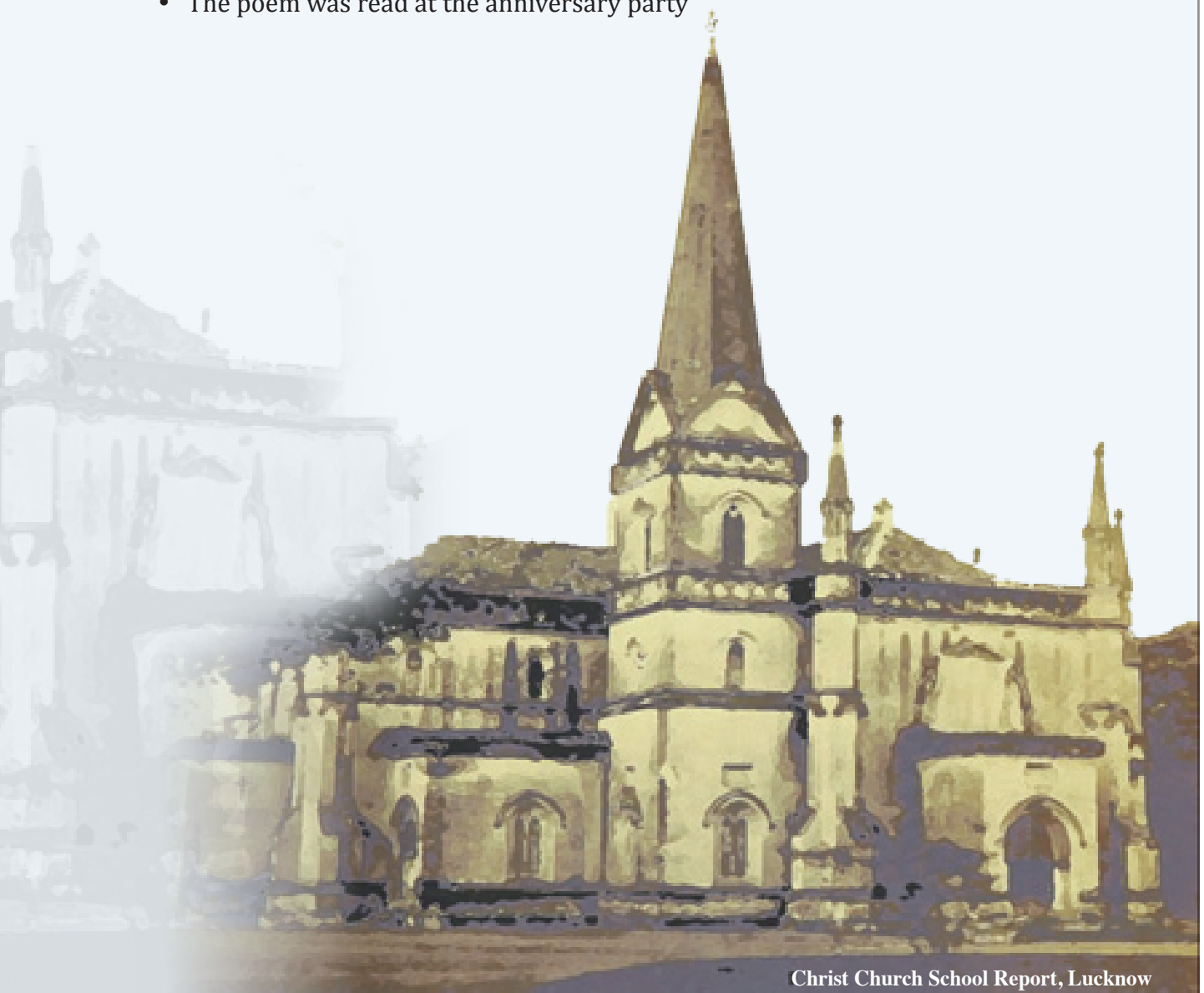
There are monthly reports. 'Expression fair;
recollection faulty.' If I run my hand
round memory, mapping India,
triangular tectonic plate, she floats,
toes Ceylon into the sea: Geography.
Legions riddle History. There are many Rs –

including right and wrong. To help us daily
differentiate, once the Catholics
and Indians have gone from the hall
we call upon 'Our Father'.
Founder's Day and Speech Day,
the School Play and sport, are full costume events

– even lunch. Each family has a bearer
in starched solar white,
swirl-sashed, twirl-turbaned,
burly and bicycled, to bring in
the *tiffin* and china and silver and linen,
and swank at long tables in *pukkah* colonial style.

Erica Warburton

- * Maidan: Parade ground. Tiffin: Packed lunch. Pukkah: Perfect
- The poem was read at the anniversary party



Christ Church School Report, Lucknow

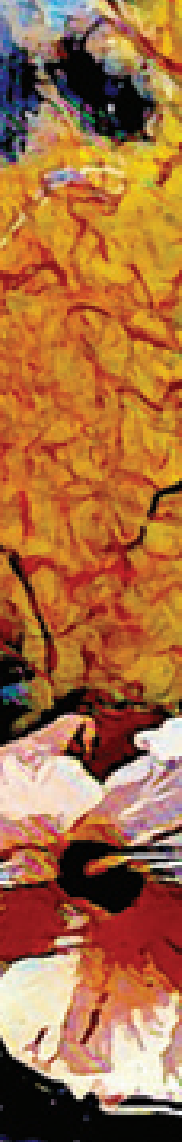
River of youth

On the other side of a wall
the boundaries of time are crossing
for all the unfortunates
trapped in their aging bodies.

We, the slanderers of reality, the awkward
bearers of desolation, the ridiculously fearful
and applause searchers are denying
the years, the days and the minutes
beyond the thin transparent layer,
between doubt and certainty
that separates us.

We are survivors, not ready to die
or to move, step aside and make room
for others, who are eager to advance.

Far from us is the endless row
of motionless young people
at the height of human perfection,
a sudden wave that swells,
is about to burst, but does not break,
instead grows higher becoming the sky of all waves,
with huge thunderclaps, in a tremendous
discharge of reality and lightning bolts
of momentary beauty.





This long row of youth pushes upwards
at night, at daytime, at dawn, at dusk,
in an overflowing stream of happiness
not to be stopped,
like a river flowing endlessly.

Poem and Artwork by Scharlie Meeuws

Memory: Misgivings



CHRIS NORRIS

Memory doesn't record our lives like a video camera. It reduces life to salient fragments and encodes those. When we recall an event, the scene is not pulled fully formed from a mental archive, but reconstructed from its constituents in the moment. We add context, factual details and perspective, each time changing the flavour of what we recall, tuning it to the present. Our memories are not fixed, but malleable and dynamic, and this is what makes them so valuable.

Ian Sample, *The Guardian*, Nov 22nd 2013

It goes as far back as your last reprise.
It goes as far
 as the last time you thought
The past might shine like Ptolemy's fixed star.

We used to think: plain sailing back to port!
We used to think:
 head for the harbour-bar
Of memory, then your vessel cannot sink.

No need to tease them out by *aide-memoir*.
No need to tease,
 we thought, since in a blink
They'd guide you home as native returnees.

Then we could sort back through them, link-by-link.
Then we could sort
 them out or launch on sprees
In Proustian mode, no gaps to cut us short.

Well under par, our memory-score decrees.
Well under par
 and likely to distort
Things all the more with each new *au revoir*.

Brain-Science Inc says it's a myth we've bought.
Brain-Science Inc
 tells us our memories are
Frail constructs teetering on oblivion's brink.



It's fakes like these that stock up the bazaar.
It's fakes like these
 that bid remembrance wink
At woods unseen for reconstructive trees.

That's why we're caught on every slightest kink.
That's why we're caught
 when fictive memories seize
Their chance and recollections self-abort.

It's make or mar, a trick to pain or please.
It's make or mar,
 that back-projection wrought
Of themes reworked on Stevens' blue guitar.

The slightest chink invites their massed onslaught.
The slightest chink
 and then their repertoire
Takes pride of place as truth's dominions shrink.

It's by degrees they crowd our sleeping-car.
It's by degrees
 past times go out-of-sync
In ways to which dream-experts hold the keys.

Nth-hand report: less vivid than you think.
Nth-hand report,
 a finding that won't please
Those who make memory their supreme court.

Just too bizarre, they say, truth's devotees.
Just too bizarre
 since urging we resort
To memory-cures far worse than the disease.

A hyperlink, some hoppers may retort.
A hyperlink
 that makes an avatar
Of each mind-skater in the memory-rink.

Yet it's hard cheese for those who bear the scar.
Yet it's hard cheese
 If they refuse to blink
At memory-gaps no fiction can appease.

Feminists on Vulnerability and Capability

DAVID CLOUGH

Was Nietzsche's life of the Overman who is always in the business of overcoming related to a life some might see today as disabled. Do reasonable feminists add a sense of vulnerability to Merleau-Ponty?

Nussbaum tempers her capability. It is not just goodness that's fragile. What exactly does my idea of sensible feminism bring to the table when a discussion of the body in the world of philosophy is already in Merleau-Ponty as well as de Beauvoir? By sensible feminism I mean the capacity to discuss wounds and fragility in thinkers working with Butler, Pamela Anderson, Morny Joy, Martha Nussbaum. But then I wondered whether the end of critique even if promoted by another feminist like Rita Felski risks being or becoming a purely intellectual affair and become all about discourse and not bodily capacity or capability. It has been realised recently that Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein might enable the idea of bodies in the world better than the critique of critique approach which was seen as more cerebral or ideological about texts not wounded bodily capabilities.

We had been doing the lament psalms at my church, and it still seemed to me that the potential for help and healing in pouring out one's grievances had

more to be said about it. How we might see small symbols of hope in the long texts, such as Morny Joy's 1994 essay *Writing as Repossession*? How might we reconnect with other viewpoints, other more hopeful scriptures and escape the feeling of enclosure? That was my reading of it as an amateur reader of Paul Ricoeur. But Morny Joy's chapter in her book cut straight to female victims of incest. Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another* deals with the issue of the two identities how we look in the social and how we hope and promise. These are related to Ricoeur's discussion of Idem (sameness beyond traits) and ipseity. I agree with Morny Joy that Ricoeur brings in poetics to help resolve the aporia of these two views of ourselves. This goes beyond the rationality of being a post-Hegelian in some respects. But then there is still a quasi-Hegelian dialectic between Idem and Ipseity. Feminism still needs a subject. So, some of the death of self-aspects of the post-structuralists went too far really even if one suspected patriarchy was underlying the whole philosophical tradition. Now Morny Joy turns to Jane Flax's reworking of Derrida and Foucault as a foil to Ricoeur. But is her account still focused on the idem-like public self? Ricoeur seems to bring aspiration into our sense of reality but as Felski reminds us also a critique.



Martha Nussbaum



Morny Joy

Ignorance and knowledge

DAVID JONES

The fictional character called Socrates that appears in many of the dialogues of Plato is depicted as claiming to have no knowledge himself but instead to possess a skill, in that he is able, by asking questions, to 'bring to birth' knowledge that others have who are unaware that they have this material that has a potential to become knowledge. The dialectical questions that Socrates asks bring into consciousness the relationships between things which provide a new layer of knowledge. The heap of disconnected particular facts of everyday experience is the 'material' that is brought into 'form' by the dialectical examination.

It is said that an oracle pronounced that Socrates was the wisest man. When Socrates heard of this he inferred that since he knew that he had no knowledge, and that he also knew that all other men mistakenly believed that they had some knowledge, then perhaps he really was the wisest through being aware of his own ignorance.

One way of interpreting what Plato was teaching through this aspect of the character Socrates is that knowledge is not disconnected facts. Knowledge comes into being anew in the process of the dynamic examination and must be rekindled in each look. The 'knowledge' that is 'hoarded away' and treasured might really be just the obstacle that stands in the way of a clear view. In this way of thinking, ignorance or the awareness of not knowing are one of the necessary conditions for a new insight.

The Wednesday

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The Wednesday *



Each week we stair squeak down into the café cellar.
A table gathering to promulgate TRUTH as each would like it /or not.
Ideas spilt between tea sips, waking up old thinkers from their cemetery sleep.
Falling-out and falling-in, all politely managed by Rahim.

But then the table is cleared and we all stumble out again,
polishing our thoughts to spill into the ether and then
onto the printed page where they truly belong.

For Kant a true idea transcends appearances.
But someone has to get it on the page,
so we can all ponder what's right and wrong.
Thanks to you Rahim, through your weekly strivings
you have created that magic; inked or ethered
our ideas live on and so therefore do we.

David Burridge

- Poem read at the anniversary celebration of **The Wednesday**