

The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

Editorial

Inverting Metaphysics

We discussed last week the move within German Idealism from transcendence to immanence. This had considerable consequences that led eventually to naturalism and materialism. The debate started when Fichte interpreted the concept of God as a shorthand for the moral order.

Hegel inherited many aspects of Fichte's philosophy, but he had a complex view of the matter we are discussing throughout his intellectual life. Unlike Fichte, Hegel saw the matter as a mixture of transcendence and immanence. For him, the God of revealed religion comes to live in the religious community, but the God of philosophy is transcendent and reveals the truth of religion. The God of philosophy is a process, revealing Himself through history. Hegel also gave a long analysis of the relationship of the finite and the infinite in what he calls the 'unhappy consciousness'. This idea had a strong influence on Feuerbach.

Schelling, in his book *System of Transcendental Philosophy* pre-figured Hegel's idea. For him: '(God) continually *reveals* Himself. Man, through his history, provides a continuous demonstration of God's presence, a demonstration, however, which only the whole of history can render complete.' But for him, this is an infinite process.

Both Schelling and Hegel were subjected to strong criticism by Feuerbach. The latter made a decisive move by psychologising the issue, an attitude that will find echoes in Nietzsche. He took religious feeling to be a projection of the human essence itself. He thought that there are human values (or attributes) that are not instantiated in an absolute way in individuals, but the individual aspires to these attributes and projects them outside himself, hence we come to the idea of a God.

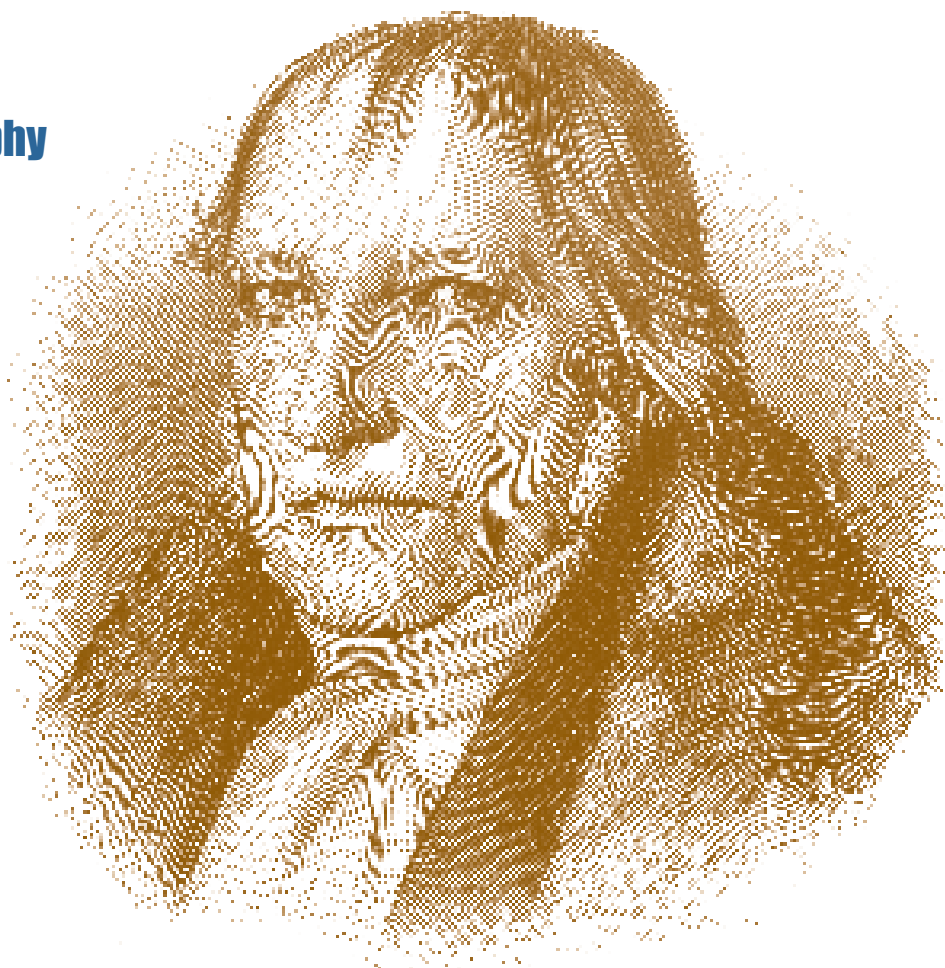
when they started writing but then subjected his thought to hard criticism. Marx in his sixth thesis on Feuerbach says: 'Feuerbach dissolves the religious essence into the human essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations.' To be more precise, these relations are relations of production and have a material basis in the means of production.

What started as a metaphysical and theological issue had now become social and political. The inversion of metaphysics was now almost complete, especially with the rise of science and materialism generally. If God on the Fichtean and Hegelian interpretation had come to live in the community, in Feuerbach God was replaced by Man to end the alienation and to rectify the unhappy consciousness. But with Marx man lost his essence and became a bundle of relations of production.

All these ideas seem challenging to traditional metaphysics and theology, but are they? Fichte rejected the accusation of atheism. In his view, the traditional belief in a God as an entity of some sort is itself idolatry. Some of the great mystics also refused to accept such a conception, especially those who subscribe to the idea of the unity of being, and come close to Hegel's idea of the dialectic of the finite and the infinite. There is also a sense of loss in culture when the idea of transcendence has been overthrown, particularly the sense of loss of the inwardness of experience. This is shown by the religious revival in former communist countries, for example. In addition, some schools of philosophy are struggling with values, meanings, imagination, beauty, truth and the good because they don't fit with a world completely described by the laws of physics. Perhaps there is some truth in what Nietzsche said that with the devaluing of the idea of God, Man also gets devalued.

Marx and Engels were highly impressed by Feuerbach

The Editor



The Goal Of Spirit Hegel And The Problem Of Freedom

The first part of this article traced the development of consciousness in Hegel's philosophy from sense-perception to absolute knowledge and spirit. In this second part, we follow the story into its practical consequences: freedom, history, alienation, God and the community.

RANJINI GHOSH

Part 2

2 **H**egel has maintained that the mind or consciousness or spirit has to move towards the path of absolute knowledge. There can be no absolute knowledge without self-consciousness. History is a record of the development of this mind or consciousness. Ancient Greece, the Roman Empire, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution are all stages in the progress of the mind or consciousness towards freedom. The French revolution was a culmination of the concept of absolute freedom. But it also created a form of tyranny of absolute power which led to terror and destruction. Hegel thought that while individuals should govern themselves according to their own conscience and convictions it was equally important that the objective world or real world of social and political institutions should be so rationally organized that individuals while acting in accordance with their own conscience



The French Revolution

do not come into conflict with the laws of these institutions. The norms of conduct imposed by these institutions in society should not limit the freedom of individuals but should be in agreement with them. True freedom can only exist when individual, subjective notions of ethics, morality and law are perfectly in harmony and agreement with similar conceptions of law and morality at the objective level of social and political institutions of the state.

Hegel believed that such a unity of individual freedom and the ethos of the social institutions could be had in an organic community. The organic community should foster those desires which benefit the community as a whole. Individual particular actions should benefit the universal or the community as a whole. Hegel saw that the Reign of Terror of the French revolution happened precisely because it failed to understand or give importance to the natural side of human beings which desire freedom. This was also the mistake made by Kant in his

universal conception of duty where duty was based on pure reason and not human desires. The French revolution also similarly accorded primacy to reason so that it tried to completely replace the old system by a new system based on reason alone. The old system of calendar dates, weights and measures were all replaced. In this case the Terror happened because the universal came in conflict with the particular and tried to negate it. The state saw the individuals as its enemies.

Hegel's conception of freedom was metaphysical. He believed that freedom only exists when we choose, our choice should be based on reason and in accordance with universal principles. These universal principles should be embodied in the organic community of the state with its social and political institutions organized similarly on a rational basis. Only in such a community will the interest of the individual be in harmony with that of the universal. For Hegel then spirit is the absolute driving force of history.



Alan Patten

Any conception of individual freedom should be based on reason and the control of the mind. A free mind will follow reason just as a river will flow into the sea without being hindered. Hegel also says that the particular minds of individuals are only aspects of a universal mind or spirit. It is only when an individual mind recognizes that they are a part of a universal mind that true freedom can be achieved.

Alan Patten says that Hegel's concept of spirit or *Geist* involves three concepts of spirit. The spirit can be in the shape of a human individual or the self-consciousness of the individual. It can also be the spirit of a group of people or the nation. In this case a whole culture becomes the locus of a set of ideas, perspectives, traditions and intellectual problems that come to represent a nation at a particular point of time. This is also called the 'spirit of the age'. A group achieves freedom and self-consciousness through its public institutions and practices of intellectual inquiry and artistic achievements. The third concept of spirit is a world spirit or absolute spirit.

Absolute Knowledge

Hegel believes that ultimate reality is the mind. It is the knowledge of self-consciousness which is the highest form of knowledge. Before

knowledge is possible consciousness has to shape and categorize the information received by the senses. Material objects are only constructs of our consciousness. The laws of science are also laws created by our consciousness to make sense of the world. So, consciousness shapes the world in its own way and in a way, it can be said that we are witness to how the mind constructs reality. It is only mind that creates a conception of reality for us.

A stage will be reached Hegel says where knowledge of reality will be fully grasped by the consciousness and it is when the mind realizes that what it wants to know is only itself. Initially reality is seen as something external to the mind but the mind slowly tries to grasp this reality and it finally reaches a stage when it understands that reality is nothing but its own creation. Hegel says that absolute knowledge is 'mind knowing itself in the shape of the mind'.

Hegel rejects the view that countless minds will have countless conceptions of realities. His form of idealism is absolute not subjective. For him there is only one reality and ultimately only one mind. He believes that reason is the ultimate constituting principle of the mind or consciousness. Since all minds are constituted by reason there will be a universal rational consciousness or a universal mind.

Dialectical Method

In his book *Philosophy of History*, Hegel saw the Greek society as based on customary morality. This was the starting point of the dialectical *thesis* but the customary morality was challenged by the independent thought and questioning of Socrates. This in turn gave rise to Christianity and a reformation which valued individual conscience. So, freedom was given primacy over custom and community. This second stage was like an opposition or a negation of the first stage and this is the *antithesis*. But absolute freedom turned itself into terror during the French revolution. Therefore, in the conflict between thesis and anti-thesis a new *synthesis* was

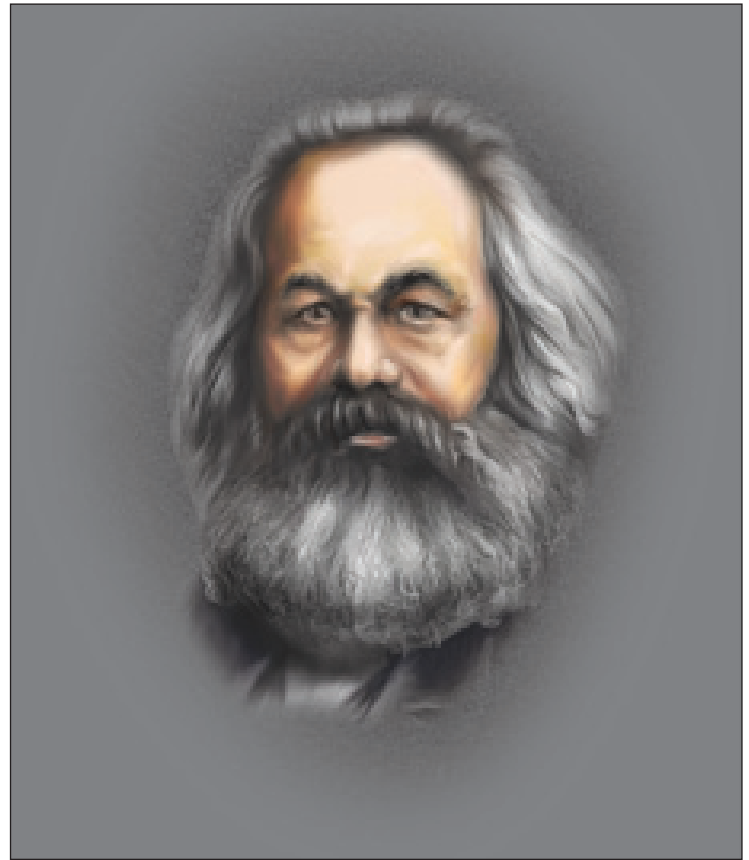
reached in the German society of the nineteenth century which preserved individual freedom and also organized political institutions rationally thus forming an organic community. Therefore, every stage in the thesis has built in seeds of its own destruction in the form of antithesis which will give rise to a new synthesis. In every stage of history one stage gives rise to its opposite which in turn leads to a new stage. By this process of dialectical movement in consciousness, the stage of 'absolute idea' is reached.

This manifests in different forms in terms of nature and mind. It permeates the entire universe of organic and inorganic matter. For Hegel, God is not something distinct from man. Considering this not to be so gives rise to 'unhappy consciousness'. It alienates the soul of man.

Freedom

According to Hegel, the task of philosophy is to identify and understand the reason contained in the actual institutions and practices of the society. He believes before freedom can be realized for individuals, the various institutions of society must be organized on the lines of reason. It is these institutions which will give actuality to the freedom of individuals. Hegel's concept of freedom is positive instead of negative freedom. Hegel doesn't mean that freedom is the absence of obstacles but that the individual is in a position to shape and control his own life. This is what he calls *self-determination*. For him freedom consists in 'being with oneself in an other'. It means that one cannot be free by avoiding others or by refusing to engage in activity or relationship with others.

Hegel's conception of freedom involves two aspects, subjective freedom and objective freedom. Subjective freedom is when the individual chooses his own ends rather than blindly following authority and these ends are based on his own desires and ambitions. Objective freedom means those ends and motives that reason prescribes. So, an individual is self-determining in the Hegelian sense if his



Marx

ends and goals are his own and they are based on reason. For Hegel objective freedom also means that the individual should comply with social codes or conduct.

Isaiah Berlin says that in the Hegelian conception an individual's self is therefore divided into two parts: empirical self and the real self. It is not enough to act on one's empirically given desires but also on the real self based on reason. Hegel's view has been criticized by many because it appears that he is trying to say that full freedom can be achieved only in the state. Hegel's main disagreement with the Kantian position is that it never tells us specifically what to do and that it brings reason into conflict with man's desire. So, the solution given by Hegel is that when the individual's desire based on reason matches that of the organic community or state then only true freedom can be found.

History

Hegel was concerned with the philosophy of history. This was a new departure in western philosophy since none of the philosophers before him attempted this. Kant saw human nature as divided between reason and desire. Hegel looked at human nature in historical terms. In ancient Greece human nature was harmonious and there was apparently no conflict between desire and reason. Hegel saw the rise of individual conscience coincided with the rise of Protestant Europe. History was a process that moved forward and this was the 'dialectical process'.

In Greek society there was no concept of individual conscience and therefore individuals did not consider themselves separate from the city-state. There was harmony between the individual and society and individuals did not make their own judgements about right and wrong. But this harmony was disrupted when Socrates started asking questions. The rise of Socrates was in a way an essential part of the historical process which led to the rise of individual conscience.

This rise was the opposite of the harmony of the Greek society. Therefore, in Hegelian terms the simple harmony was the 'thesis' to which the individual conscience was 'antithesis'. The 'synthesis' was reached during the French Revolution. This way the process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis continue in the process of history.

The simple harmony of the Greek society could not continue indefinitely because of the development of the principle of reason in Greek thought. Rational beings started questioning the social norms. But for Hegel the more important development in the historical process is the development of the mind towards freedom. It is a process of increasing awareness of freedom.

Peter Singer says that to Hegel history happens to the 'mind'. The 'spirit' which Hegel refers to

also refers to the spirit of the time. The mind Hegel talks about is not the individual mind but a reality beyond it. For him total reality is unity and that it is something mental or spiritual. It is the Mind that develops during the course of history.

To Hegel God is the world and is not separate from the world. He believes that the spirit is manifested in everything in the universe. He understands the Mind in a collective sense referring to the common elements in our minds and our common ability to reason. Hegel therefore introduced two fundamental ideas in western philosophy.

The first idea is that the whole of reality is a historical process. And the second idea is that this reality is dialectic.

Alienation

Hegel also can be said to have introduced another idea which is of 'alienation' although it was later used by Karl Marx in his theory. By 'alienation' Hegel meant that the individual is an unhappy soul who is alienated through religion. The individual prays to God whom he regards as all powerful but in contrast he sees himself as powerless and ignorant. He regards himself as separate from God who is unattainable. But Hegel believes that we are all part of God and we only project our qualities onto God.

The end point of the dialectical process for Hegel is when the Mind comes to know itself as the ultimate reality. This is Absolute Knowledge. It is a state of absolute freedom because the Mind is not controlled by external forces and sees the world as itself. The mind is able to organize the world rationally. Freedom is associated with this knowledge of reality when it is realized that the essence of reality is the rational principle.

Hegel did not believe, like Plato, that Ideas were abstract and unchanging but that they were embodied in societies and historical realities which change over time.

Oh Hegel

Edward Greenwood



Oh Hegel, Friedrich Hegel, what is it you'd be at?
Your constant pumping up of Geist just leaves me feeling flat,
I never know quite what to think when I read you for long,
You seem to compass everything, except perhaps for song.
The snatches of some nursery rhyme would hardly seem to hide
A scope for metaphysics that is buried deep inside.
Religion, science, art, they all parade before our gaze
Evoked with an authority that can't fail to amaze,
A gallery of Geist for minds to wander and admire,
Although, like other galleries, it's sometimes apt to tire.
The total sum of things somehow is fused into the 'One',
Appearance and Reality? We find that difference gone.
And when the world is all dissolved into the world of Mind,
Perhaps the latter really makes what it just seems to find.
All in the end is History, where Geist for sure will see
The triumph, at the end of all, of rational Liberty.
Though we pathetic struggling parts will never know the whole,
That Geist will know it at the last is somehow to console,
For everything that was and is is destined to remain
As one among the many links in Being's mighty chain,
And though, as individuals, there's no way we'll survive,
In Geist's capacious memory we'll all be still alive.
Was ever a philosophy so absolutely thetic*?
But I prefer philosophy that's piecemeal and zetetic*,
And yet no doubt it's tempting scope will once again inveigle
My head to vanish deep inside the honey pot of Hegel.

* Thetic= philosophy of positive assertion

* Zetetic= philosophy of constant searching

Time and the Physicist



CHRIS NORRIS

The uniform nature of time is scarcely the only feature where our intuition has turned out to be mistaken. To everybody's surprise, the difference between past and future fails to show up in the elementary equations that govern the physical world. But the discovery that has been the most disconcerting of all has been finding out that the notion of 'present' does not make sense in the larger universe; it only makes sense in the vicinity of us slow human critters.

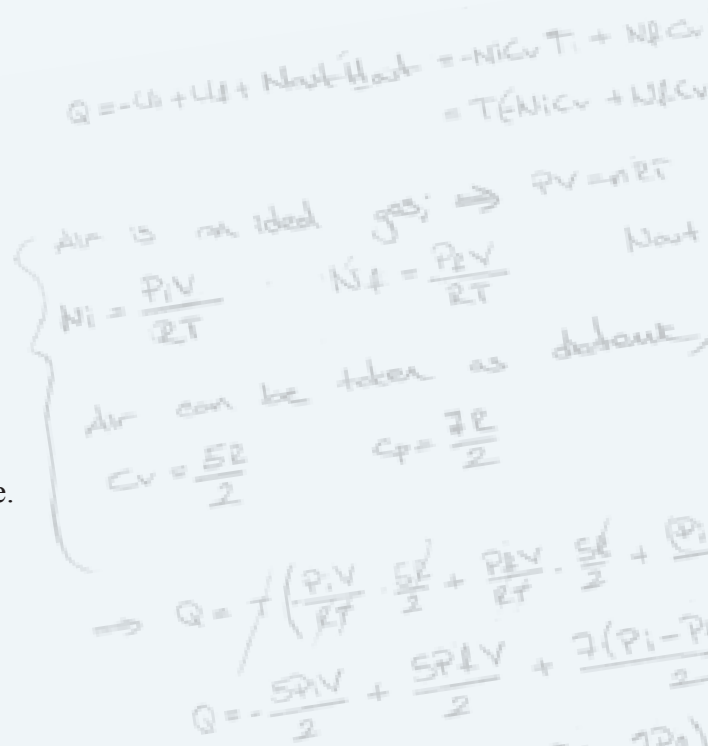
Carlo Rovelli

We common readers continue to look up to them [physicists] as the repository of knowledge and begin to regard them as the custodians of the spiritual element in the universe. They — or to speak more moderately, some of them — have long aspired to the mantle of the prophets; now we thrust the mantle upon them . . . The situation does not lack an element of comedy.

L. Susan Stebbing, *Philosophy and the Physicists* (1939)



One way of looking at it: time's the rate
Of outcomes fixed, doubts laid to rest,
Hypotheses shown true
Or falsified,
And all our clue-by-clue
Inductive reasoning put to test
As more conjectures pass their use-by date,
Lives work out pretty much as guessed
(Or not), and things that do,
Or did, betide
Us right out of the blue
Turn past-event and join the rest
Of what we once put down to chance or fate.



Rovelli says we get it wrong: we think,
 Like Newton, time's a one-way flow
 Past-present-future, or
 Espouse the line
 That time's the very core
 Of human being, what we know
 Most intimately in ourselves, yet blink
 At any thought that we should go
 Some abstract way to draw
 Its superfine
 Gradations out, ignore
 What Bergson said, and strive to show
 How well clock-time and inner time-scales sync.

Rovelli's view of time: its arrow's sped
 Along by entropy, by all
 The multitude of ways
 The Second Law
 (Thermodynamics) says
 No going back, no second call,
 And no prognosticating what's ahead
 Except the physicist's long-haul
 Heat-death accounts that faze
 The hoppers, awe
 Post-humanists, and raise
 The culture-stock of those in thrall
 To any doomsday script with science-cred.

Old news: like Eddington, he's out to stun
 A readership once prone to kid
 Themselves they'd got time right
 Despite their lack
 Of physics-grasp. This might,
 With help from pop-sci primers, rid
 The world of sundry errors like the one
 About time passing, lift the lid
 On all the recondite
 Events they track,
 Those physicists, and fight
 The vulgar prejudice that hid
 A realm where writs of common sense don't run.



$T = N_{\text{out}} C_P$
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 $= \frac{V}{2} (2P_1 - 2P_2) = V(P_1 - P_2)$



Fair point: we've science-ignorance to blame
 For much that's wrong, not least the sorts
 Of falsehood pushed by those
 With most to gain
 If we're led by the nose
 And swallow science-lite reports
 Produced, to wide political acclaim,
 By some committee that distorts
 All findings apt to pose
 A threat or strain
 Our willingness to close
 Eyes, ears, or bias-checking thoughts
 To what goes on in that mock-science game.

Yet should the latest, physics-based ideas
 Of time and space get so far out
 Of kilter with the way
 They seem to us
 Then, really, who's to say
 It's our ideas we're bound to doubt
 Instead, more sensibly, of thinking: here's
 An instance where the most devout
 Scientophile might lay
 Old ghosts and thus
 Come to accept there may
 Be truths that lack such physics-clout
 Yet hold for us across these new frontiers.



Rovelli

Skip eight decades and maybe you'll conclude
That Stebbing got it right, or that
The jury's out, or – if
You find the whole
Thing pointless – that their tiff,
Stebbing v Eddington, was flat-
Out misconceived, its terms expressly skewed
To mean what each was aiming at,
For Stebbing a nice riff
On her chief role
In roping off the cliff
Where science-lemmings splat,
For Eddington a lesson to the brood
Of physics-phobes who'd got off pat,
Like her, a way to sniff
At the high toll
Of sense paid on a whiff
Of scientism. All old hat,
Rovelli thinks, that routine attitude

Of undisguised hostility between
Two cultures that, in truth, should rub
Along just fine since they're
Not out to seize
The high ground but to share
It on his terms: physics the nub
Of every quest for knowledge, every keen
New aspirant to join the club
Of science, but – with care
To quell unease
In those who must forswear
Such things – 'the arts' as due to scrub
Up their antique credentials and so glean
The kindly credit due to sub-
Altern endeavors where
The legatees
Of everyman find their
Back-hand remittance for the snub
Renewed when Science PR sets the scene.



Far From Knowledge

And suddenly in this tedious nowhere
where too little feels too much,
and all things hush,
you look. How long?

Mind! The eye of the pond stares blankly.
Still dragonflies carry messages,
on and on.

Will you listen to the choice of the wind?
All the ceaseless answers
that form themselves out of silence?

Oh, where is that place,
far from knowledge
but near to the heart's voices?

When we think we're holding it,
at last,
we had it all along
embracing us.

Poems and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*



Can Robots Replace Humans?

Notes on the Wednesday Meeting Held on 12th of September

PAUL COCKBURN

The meeting discussed the problems of new technology. Heidegger in his essay of 1954 'The Question Concerning Technology' famously tried to show in philosophical terms the danger of modern technological thinking for humanity. We see nature as a means to an end, but 'being' is revealed to us in a different way. He thought that the essence of technological thinking is harmful. He wanted to go back to the Greek language: originally language was poetic, closer to 'being'. The etymology of technology is: 'techne' = art, craft and '-logy' = word, expression.

In his first lectures after the Second World War given at Bremen Heidegger said:

'Agriculture is now a mechanized food industry, in essence the same as the production of corpses in the gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as the blockading and starving of countries, the same as the production of hydrogen bombs. Factories, large-scale industry, standing reserve, the human is treated as a work-machine.'

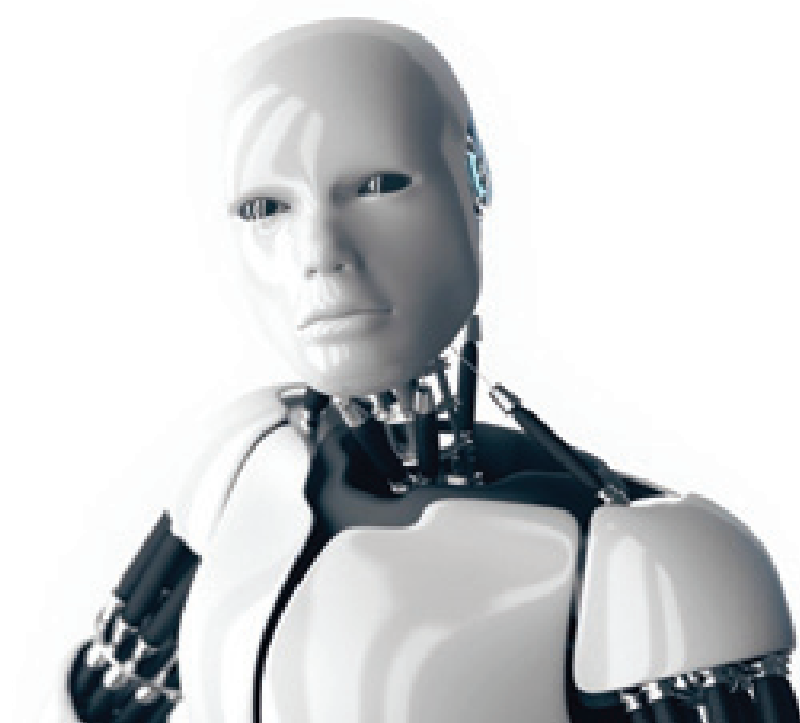
He thought a bridge you walk across to cross a river enhances a river: however, a large hydro-electric plant demeans the river, as it blocks the natural function of water flowing.

We don't seem to be in control of technology. What ends are we pursuing? – we seem to want more and more technological products, so that the economy grows. The internet in the hands of a few technology companies grew into a worldwide phenomenon with no controls placed on it. Now we see it has significant harmful social effects as well as benefits.

Robots

We moved on to discuss robots. Can we stop the rise of killer robots, much loved in American sci-fi films? We may also be able to turn humans into cyborgs. Human bodies (and brains) are organic, based mainly on carbon chemistry. In the future robots could be physically built from inorganic matter (such as metals and silicon) with computer brains controlling them. What sort of brains could these be? They could control movement of the machine, and they could be programmed to be rational, and to follow rules and algorithms. Algorithms are pattern-based, and could be used in a similar way to our senses. Intelligence (or rationality?) may be split from consciousness and embodied in AI machines and robots. Some philosophers of mind, eliminative materialists, believe human behaviour can be explained by the activity of neural network activity patterns in the brain, explaining even the higher functions such as consciousness and self-consciousness. However, it is hard to see how a robot could experience pleasure, or appreciate music. Robots could be programmed to do repetitive actions, but could they have emotions and express themselves? They could perhaps be programmed to have emotions in terms of cognition, but affective emotions, such as our cheeks flushing red with anger when we are embarrassed, might be difficult to simulate!

A key question is about how robots could be programmed to learn. A human being develops from a baby to an adult, hopefully in a caring family, and learns in a social context. If you produce a ready-made 'adult' robot, ready to carry out its tasks, it may not be able to adapt, or be able to cope correctly in new



circumstances, and lack a knowledge of appropriate cultural behaviour. Could a robot have agency, or a conscience? Could a robot have free will and find meaning in its life? How would it be programmed to relate to other robots? To humans? It is interesting that many of the questions raised about robots make us think about what it means to be human.

Hegel:

Notes from the 5th of September Meeting

A conference on Hegel had recently taken place in Oxford. Two of our number went to it. One felt initially the talk of such metaphysical entities as Being and Nothingness was too abstract, but warmed to the idea of thesis, antithesis and synthesis being instantiated in history. But does oppositional conflict always lead to synthesis? Certainly not in negotiations between unions and management!

We moved on to consider whether Hegel followed Aristotle in terms of his emphasis on teleology. When Hegel applies this to history, it leads to the idea of progress in history leading to a fulfilling end, an idea that Marx developed in economic terms in the Communist Manifesto.

The Wednesday

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Dasein



What is it up there which is above and beyond itself?
Something more than I could imagine or reason
Then why do I need to bother?
Past, present, future have a buoyancy outside my reach.
Is it like a balloon that doesn't need my push or tug?
But then the plastic had been made down here in real time.
When it goes pop it will no longer exist beyond a slack strip.
Why did he want to lift truth above our heads?
To take charge of course: *Ich bin das Volk!*
Time to climb back down to sweet particulars.

David Burridge