

The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

Editorial

Philosophy and the Subjective/Objective Divide

Philosophy now has become a victim of its own success. It became more professional and technical but, in many aspects, lost the personal, human touch. It has been said of the Pre-Socratic philosophers that they were natural scientists, theorising about what made up reality. But it was Socrates who introduced an epistemic shift from thinking about external reality to the examined life. It was a move from the objective to the subjective.

This divide of subjective/objective is an attitude of mind or an unconscious theoretical frame for thinking. I call it attitude because I feel it is something that forms the background to a lot of philosophy or, you could say, the power behind philosophy, especially recent philosophy. Philosophy, unlike science, is expressive. It is not located in facts, as is science, but in bringing something new into reality. It is more akin to art. Both have a high degree of individuality and originality.

It is now a common way of teaching, or writing philosophy to take the Internalist (agent)/Externalist (fact) points of view. The latter may be characterised as '*The View From Nowhere*' in the famous title of Nagel's book. This attitude is dominant in the philosophy of language and philosophy of mind, with the sometimes counter-intuitive claim that meaning and mind are out there outside the agent. It is also a continual battle in epistemology between the two sides. Normally students are given two sets of papers to read and to make up their minds about, which is a fair game.

But the division can be seen in the way of philosophising and the language of philosophy. Kant, for example, thought and wrote in a very objective way. But every now and then you hear the voice of the author making a personal claim,

such as, that he denied knowledge to make room for faith. Nietzsche, on the other hand, thought that philosophy is completely subjective. It is, on his account, the confession of the philosopher.

Related to the points above is the attitude of readers to their philosophers. Some take the philosophical text as a final statement, colourless, just like a technical manual. But research has shown that philosophers change their views over time. Jaeger found this in the Aristotelian texts. Plato changed his mind a few times, first separating his view from Socrates, by introducing the idea of the forms, and later objecting in his *Seventh Letter* to putting any understanding of real worth in writing. It is to do with their personal and intellectual development.

But important issues arise, such as intellectual charity and intellectual honesty. These are subjective values that determine your attitude to any philosophical text, written by others or by yourself. Losing one of them or both may turn you into a Sophist whose sole aim is to win the argument. The Sophists in the days of Socrates, were not aiming at the truth but at winning the argument or dominating the debate and there are many such Sophists around in our time.

Finally, there is the attitude to learning and teaching philosophy. Do we study philosophy out of sheer curiosity or do we want to learn something from it? What is it that we want to learn? Is it a set of facts, such as in natural science or is it an insight into ourselves and reality? It may be observed here that many philosophy lecturers, say in ethics, are poor in their moral commitments but they may be successful in their professional life. All this is a reminder that the personal, subjective element has an essential moral role in conduct as well as in knowledge.

The Editor

Philosophy

Existentialism: Essential Questions about Consciousness and Life

Existentialism has been one of the most important philosophical movements of the twentieth century. It has raised some of the most crucial questions concerning our lives. These are questions of meaning, of freedom, of responsibility and authenticity and the absurdity of life. All these topics will be discussed in this article which we will publish in two parts.

RANJINI GHOSH

Part 1

Existentialism starts with the assumption that we are thrown into a universe that does not care about us and we have no pre-determined purpose in being here and no pre-determined essence of who we are. Our existence comes first and what we become later on depends on what we choose to do with our freedom. Existence precedes essence, said Sartre. In this essay we shall explore some of the main themes of existentialism and in particular we will examine some key concerns in the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simon de Beauvoir.

Existence

Sartre believed that human beings have a distinctive manner of existing. In the western philosophical tradition, particularly since Descartes, human beings have been conceptualized as having *consciousness*. Sartre contrasted the being of consciousness with the being of all other things. He said that all non-human entities have existence *in-itself* (*en-soi*). What it means is that a particular thing is exactly what it is. But in human beings there is a consciousness which is *for-itself* (*pour-soi*). This means that to exist we have an idea of ourselves. This consciousness of oneself is what distinguishes human beings from other creatures. Sartre said that in perceiving the world and its objects a human being who is observing is not only involved in the act of perception but simultaneously is aware of himself perceiving the world. A being who is *for-itself* is different because

he consciously makes choices.

Sartre also used the concept of ‘nothingness’ in his analysis of consciousness. He gives a specific example of a car that has broken down. When a mechanic looks at the car and examines the carburetor, he is asking himself whether there is nothing there in the carburetor. He is not looking for the carburetor which is there. But the mechanic must be looking for something which is not there. Therefore, what he is doing is that he is injecting into the world of existing things a *non-being* (functioning car) which is not actually present. So, what we have is a non-being, a *nothing* because we are actually placing it there. *Consciousness* contributes *nothingness* to *being*. In order to further explain his concept of nothingness he gives the example of Pierre who is not there in the café. The café is full of beings, but Sartre says that we at once notice the absence of Pierre whom we expect to meet there and in becoming aware of his absence we *nihilate* or negate the presence of everyone else in the room. So, we become aware of Pierre in the mode of *nothing*. In doing so we are adding *nothingness* to the world. He also explained the project of human freedom in terms of *transcendence* and *facticity*.

Human beings have the ability to move beyond their given circumstances (facticity). One can think of the painter Paul Gauguin who was a stockbroker and one day he decided to leave



Sartre



Kierkegaard

everything and move to Tahiti and be a painter. Thereby he achieved transcendence from his everyday facticity. But the problem does not end there. Once we achieve transcendence we create a new facticity. Therefore, in Sartre's view freedom condemns us to a restless existence. Human beings are also aware that they are aware of something. He says that because of this consciousness which we have we cannot fully inhabit any feeling. Because we are always distancing ourselves from our own feelings in the process of being aware.

Others

Since the time of Descartes western philosophy has been plagued by two types of skeptical problems. First there has been a skepticism about the external world, whether we can have any knowledge of the reality outside ourselves at all. The second problem has been whether we can have any knowledge of other people and their minds. We only have a privileged access to our own minds. Berkeley believed that we have knowledge of our immediate perceptions. The Rationalists on the other hand argued that reason was a better judge of knowing reality than the senses. Spinoza who was a rationalist believed that we can have knowledge that there are other minds in the world and this is only possible because all minds are part of one single substance i.e. God or Nature.

Heidegger's solution to this debate was to propose

that instead of saying that our knowledge of ourselves is different from our knowledge of others, we should better think of ourselves as existing in a world along with others. Human beings are embodied creatures existing in a world. To be a being or *Dasein* is to exist in the world along with other *Daseins*. Heidegger said that when we look at ordinary items in our everyday lives like chairs and tables we are actually seeing them as objects which have some utility for us and in this process we also come to realize that through these very things we become related to other beings because in the creation of such an item or thing other human beings have been involved at various stages. In his famous study of Vincent Van Gogh's painting *Shoes* he interprets the painting as revealing a world of peasant women whose shoes we are looking at. We see in the shoes the silent call of the earth and the gift of ripening grain.

The painting, for Heidegger, gives us access through the shoes to the world of the peasant women. We are at once made aware of a world populated by other beings. The world is a web of complex relationships of *Daseins*. He overturned the Cartesian concept of mind-body dualism. The problem then is not how to know other minds but fundamentally how we are connected with other beings in our world. Heidegger also said that we are existing in a world where we are forever trying to conform to what others think about us.

Philosophy

The community imposes its standards on the individual. Sartre not only talked of *in-itself* and *for-itself* but also of a third ontological category: *for-another*. This is also a fundamental feature of our existence. He gives an example of jealousy when all of our consciousness becomes colored by a single perspective or emotions. Othello, who is consumed by jealousy sees the whole world in a framework of jealousy and every object for him becomes an indication of unfaithfulness. But in the same process he also himself becomes an object for others to see.

Sartre says that we are forever aware of the existence of others who are watching us. Sartre said that since we become objects of 'looking' by others then this experience constitutes me as someone with a fixed nature. This takes away my ability to control my own fate. My objectification in the eyes of the others restricts my being. For Sartre a purely dyadic relation is not possible because there is always a possibility of being observed by a third person. He said, 'Hell is other people'. When other people are watching us we become like mere objects.

The Absurd

Soren Kierkegaard said that the basic feature of religion was that it put forward concepts that were contrary to reason and therefore appeared absurd. Examples in Christian religion are the concept of virgin birth, God taking on human form, death leading to resurrection etc. In order for human beings to take religious beliefs seriously one would have to take a leap of faith. Existentialists have said in their own ways that life has no meaning and is therefore absurd. But in contrast to this view of a meaningless life, Christian theologians have tried to say that the purpose of life is to fulfill God's wish. All traditional religious views have a teleological conception of human life. In a way they say that whether it is human beings or knives everything has a pre-ordained purpose. But existentialists have first of all rejected any pre-determined nature of human existence. Sartre and others have argued that man creates himself after he comes into existence. This goes against any teleological view of human life. Human beings have no pre-ordained purpose and we are free to



Paul Gauguin

create ourselves. We do not have any essential nature or a purpose.

In his famous book *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus gave us a distinct conception of the absurd. There is a lack of fit between the individual and the world. The world, for Camus, is neither rational nor irrational but just proceeds on its own way without regard for human beings. We human beings have a tendency to personify Nature. We often say that Nature is kind or cruel. Wordsworth said, 'Nature never did betray the heart that loved her', and 'Nature is our friend, philosopher and guide'. But Nature is not a conscious agent that can be cruel or have compassion. Camus says that the most important ontological fact about human beings is that we always want things to make sense to us. We are always seeking meaning and rationality in the order of things. Camus thinks that it is absurd to ask for reason in a universe that cannot provide us with reason or meaning. Life is absurd because we cannot get any explanation from the world we live in.

The whole of Western philosophy has been devoted to finding meaning in the reality around



Gauguin: 'Where Do We Come From What Are We Where Are We Going,' 1897,
(Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA.)

us. Hegel said, 'the real is rational and the rational is real'. Hegel thought there was a rational core in the development of the world. But Kierkegaard rejected Hegel's reason-based conception of the world. For him though religion seems absurd, yet one had to have faith in God and there could be no rational basis for this. Camus said that though Sisyphus realized the futility of rolling a stone up a hill and see it come down every time, he said that Sisyphus was happy because he mocked at the Gods to get over his despair. Camus says that, 'there is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn'. Sisyphus is happy because he scorns the Gods. Sisyphus, instead of being sad interprets the situation in a different manner by mocking the Gods.

Camus saw suicide as the single most important philosophical problem. To him suicide does not make sense as a solution to the absurdity of life. One should not be defeated by the absurdity of our life. One can achieve happiness by developing a sense of scorn.

Authenticity

Heidegger said that when we anticipate death in our lives then we can truly have an authentic conception of life. Because death is an individual experience for everyone and when one experiences this feeling that one is going to die then one really understands the meaning of life for oneself. The existentialists have argued that for most part of our lives we remain conformists. We do not lead authentic lives. We live in a manner which the other would like us to live. Nietzsche and Sartre in their own ways have argued that one has to create oneself authentically by rejecting the social norms that make us conformists. Nietzsche through his concept of the Eternal Recurrence exhorts us to live life in a manner which we will not regret and will opt to live again in the same manner given a chance. But existentialism has also been criticized for its concepts of choice and authenticity. Hitler might have defended himself by arguing that he had led an authentic life as per his own choices. Existentialism has been seen as lacking an adequate means for evaluating the morality of actions.

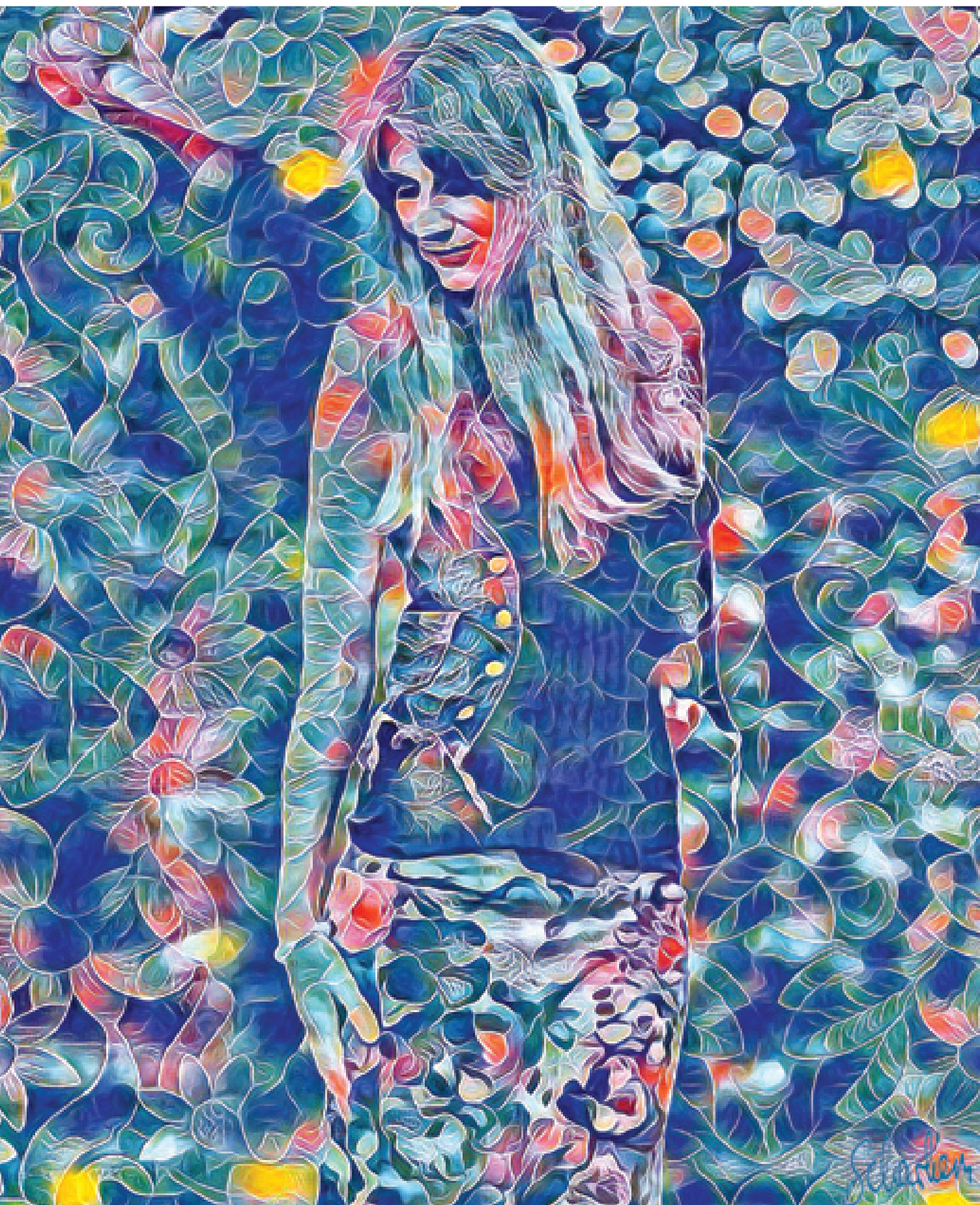
Dreamland

The night throws itself far into space.
Stars crash through darkness past the sharp-edged moon
pulling space down to enter through open windows,
looped in the mirrored glass, black and glistening,
until sleep drowns silent noises of breaking,
only guessed in violent dreams till the early morning.
Then iridescence all over, meadows like new, the wind
bends the tall grasses swaying waves in an emerald
shining sea, star-shaped flowers float up
to the sky, absorbing the sunlight.

Soon they will wither in the midday heat, ducking,
when the first autumn winds rip out their petals.
Rain clouds appear out of nowhere, play hide-and-seek
with high circling birds and dissolve as camouflage.
At dusk all things disappear, when the shadows
overcome light and sink underneath the foundations,
deep down into dreamland, like so many remnants before.
The soft ground is giving way, trees and bushes tremble
in anticipation, while the stones cry out
for whatever is approaching.

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*





A Step into Reality

In the seventh century BCE, a child was born in southern Anatolia. His name was Anaximander, Son of Peroxides. He was the first of the Greek philosophers that we know of to leave a written account of 'nature'. His views pre-figured the Copernican revolution.

NONA FERDON

In southern Anatolia, some ten kilometres from the sea, lies the ruins of a great city, Miletus. It was once considered the greatest Greek metropolis of the age. Pliny the Elder mentioned some ninety colonies founded by Miletus. But now it lies far from the sea on a deserted plain without soil or trees. Even its once splendid Market Gate now stands in the Pergamum museum in Berlin.

In the sixth century BC, the city was a strong, flourishing metropolis on the coast of Anatolia with busy trading connections around the Mediterranean. The Archaic period of Greece began with a sudden and brilliant flash of art and philosophy. Miletus was the site and origin of the Greek philosophical and scientific tradition, when Thales, followed by Anaximander and Anaximenes (known collectively to modern scholars as the Melanesian School) began to speculate about the material constitution of the world and to propose speculative naturalistic (as opposed to traditional, supernatural) explanations for various phenomena.

In that city, on the Ionian coast, was opened a new path to knowledge and a new route for humanity. This was the birthplace of thinking that is based on rationality, curiosity and change.

In c. 610 BCE, a child was born. His name was Anaximander, Son of Peroxides. He was the first of the Greek philosophers that we know of to leave a written account of his concept of 'nature'. Unfortunately, only a handful of sentences survive. But happily, he appears to us through other minds down the ages. As Pliny the Elder first said 'Anaximander of Miletus first opened the doors of nature.'

Anaximander paved the way for physics, geography,

meteorology and embryology. He set in motion the process of a rational conception of the universe. 'He redesigned the universe. He changed the very grammar of our understanding of the universe. He modified the very structure of our conception of space.'

For Anaximander, the multiplicity of things that constitute nature (our reality) derives from a single origin or principle, called the 'Apeiron' the 'indefinite', or 'infinite'(or 'The Boundless'). 'The Boundless' can be seen as the original source of existing things; and furthermore, the source from which existing things derive their existence and also that to which they return at their destruction, 'according to necessity.'

According to Anaximander, the world came into being when hot and cold separated from the 'Apeiron' - the Boundless. This separation generated the cosmic order. A ball of flame grew around the earth. This ball then broke apart and was confined inside the wheels that form the sun, the moon, and the stars. 'The Boundless' is the original material of existing things; and the source to which existing things return. The sun, moon, and stars formed complete circles. These 'wheels', similar to wagon wheels, carry them along.

In all the information that has come down to us of concepts of reality earlier than Anaximander, Greek or otherwise, natural phenomena like rain, thunder, earthquakes, and wind are always explained in mythical and religious terms; manifestations of incomprehensible forces attributed to divine beings: Zeus, Eolus Poseidon, etc. Before the sixth century BCE, there was no sign of any attempt to think of these phenomena as tied to natural causes, independent of the will and decision of the gods.



Anaximander

This immense turning point first took place in Greek thought of the six-century BCE and is consistently attributed to Anaximander in all of the ancient texts. As Aristotle explained:

'according to Anaximander, there is a deep body distinct from the elements, the Boundless, which is not air or water.' 'The elements are in opposition to each other: air cold, water moist, and fire hot. Therefore, if any one of them were infinite, they would have ceased to be. Thus, he said that what is infinite is something other than elements.'

Here is a likely summary of the content of Anaximander's own concept of 'nature':

1. The transformation of one thing into another is regulated by 'necessities,' which determines how phenomena unfold in time.

2. The multiplicity of things that constitutes nature

derives from a single origin or principle, call the 'Apeiron' and are the 'infinite' or 'indefinite.'

3. the world came into being when hot and cold separated from the Apeiron. This separation generated the cosmic order. A ball of flame formed around the air and the earth 'like the bark of a tree.' This ball then broke apart and was confined inside the wheels that formed the sun, moon and stars. The earth was originally covered in water, which dried up.

4. The earth is a body of finite dimensions floating in space. It doesn't fall because there is no particular direction toward which it might fall. It is 'dominated by no other body.'

5. The sun, moon, and the stars rotate around the earth, forming complete circles. Immense wheels, similar to wagon wheels, carried them along.

6. Meteorological phenomena have natural causes. Rain is water from the sea and rivers that evaporates because of the sun's heat. It is carried away by the wind and then falls onto the earth.

7. All animals originally came from the sea from the primal humidity that once covered the earth. The first animals were thus either fish or fish-like creatures. They moved onto land when the earth became dry, and they adapted to living there. Human beings, in particular, cannot have been born in their current form, because babies are not self-sufficient, so someone else had to have fed them. We grew out of fish-like creatures.

Certainly, we can hear echoes of Anaximander in Darwin, Newton, Galileo, Einstein, et cetera. In his presidential address to the Aristotelian Society entitled 'Back to the pre-Socratics' Karl Popper gave a partial survey of pre-Socratic thought, in order to show that it supports his idea that scientific discovery begins not from observations or experiments but from theories and critical speculation. For Popper 'the beautiful study of the pre-Socratics' produced fascinating cosmological explanations. This 'anticipation of modern results' is staggering. And those explanations, which were intuitions or theories and not the result of observations, helped to validate that this is how science actually proceeds.

One cannot possibly address the many, many concepts of Anaximander. They changed the course of human knowledge. One last possible concept that might strike us all today is:

'that the earth is suspended in the void, supported by nothing, but stable because of its distance from everything...'

Thale's earth was a floating disc; its round shape came from the ancient idea that the universe forms a circle surrounded by sea. Anaximander, on the other hand, held the view that the idea of water supporting the earth wasn't needed. Without the ocean, he is left with a disc floating in space. (There are really no 'turtles all the way down') His understanding that the earth is a stone that floats unsupported in space, with the same heaven underneath it as the one we see above is a huge step forward conceptually. The conceptual leap from a flat earth to a finite earth floating in space is an immense and arduous one. The steps that Anaximander took are similar to the ones that Copernicus and Galileo took that led to a scientific revolution. It is to Anaximander, then, without the slightest doubt, goes the full credit for the first cosmological revolution.

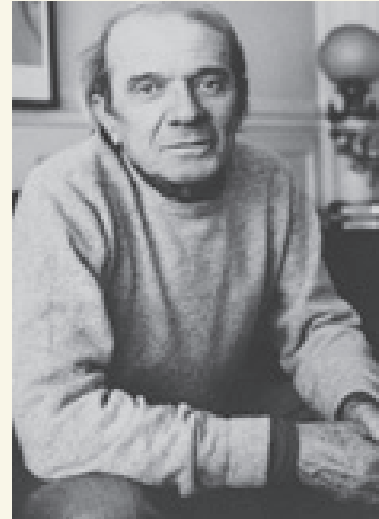
(It is worth mentioning that not long ago in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, a Flat Earth Conference took place. It attracted more than 200 people.)

Violence of Thought

DAVID CLOUGH

Deleuzian descriptions of thought frequently invoke scenes of violence. Indeed, in *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze claims that thought is 'primarily trespass and violence'. His critique of the traditional image of thought is accomplished with a certain rhetorical violence, and is rife with its own images of cruelty, crucifixion, and torture.

The early Foucault also warns that the very operation of thought can 'liberate and enslave'. He cautions that thought is always already perilous, more or less permanently menaced by violence. Jacques Derrida has suggested that there is a violence embedded in phenomenality itself, such that the very appearance of a world entails a requisite exercise of force.



Deleuze

But these invocations of violence are similarly manifest in continental feminist writings. Luce Irigaray's psychoanalytic critiques of various figures in the tradition frequently invoke the charge of matricide. Julia Kristeva has also claimed that 'matricide is our vital necessity'.

Deleuze wants to avoid capture by the image and the violence of Plato's cave but are body politic spasms going to do this? Meanwhile Blanchot, Nancy, Derrida, Agamben and Foucault have a different way of avoiding the too definite an image of their impossible coming community politics. But for Deleuze something like the erotic spasms or body energy will get us there, as he sees illustrated in Bacon's paintings. But we seem to get a more Nietzschean decentred subject situated in the Bakhtinian position of seeing pan-optically on the border or periphery.

Agamben has quite a long description, starting with globalised civil war (which only emerges explicitly later) of a petty bourgeoisie. But he differs from Derrida in not seeing our identity in terms of Nietzsche's army of metaphors, or the Lacanian illusion or fantasy of absolute oneness, or even the so-called process of infinite referral. Instead, some kind of Messianic time replaces deferred impossible potential future time as Derrida has it.

Moonshine

**To use the moonshine of metaphor, I lost
shamantistic years in food-gathering cultures -
those spare localities of the present tense - and then,
chancing on language, I began to open the past and its declensions.**

**One day, I may be a real explorer
searching for exactitude, whilst accepting
the paradox that every discovery might
expose more ambiguity. Already, I distrust
spontaneous handling, or paint worked up
and finished, because I know metaphor is
bad scientific theory - a beginning only -
although Aristotle called it a gift.**

**Now finches, like coloured candles, light
the larch, and trumpets of Bach gloss the sky.
It never rains, but it flowers books in each divide. They are
innocent bridges that force me farther and farther from the shore.**

Erica Warburton

Taking a Broader View of Philosophy

Further reflection on the Wednesday meetings

CHRIS SEDDON

Seven philosophers met on Wednesday 24th of October in the lower room at the Opera Café, Jericho, Oxford to discuss two topics: women in philosophy, and the cognitive content of art. Both topics led the group to explore several putative polarities in ways of thinking and doing philosophy.

Women philosophers considered included G. E. M. Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Susanne Langer, Mary Midgley, Iris Murdoch, Martha Nussbaum, and Mary Warnock. The group considered whether there were any particularly feminine topics or styles of thinking in the philosophy and broader lives of these and other women philosophers. Some examples seemed to illustrate a feminine propensity to take the broader view by putting philosophy into action outside academia into the arena of literature, politics, poetry, or art, but counter-examples included male philosophers who had done the same and female philosophers who had not. Similarly, although it was acknowledged that

philosophy can benefit from thought that is subjective, intuitive, compassionate, explorative, co-operative, or creative, rather than objective, fully-reasoned, dispassionate, purpose-driven, combative, or contemplative, it was not always clear in practice or even in principle that all of these traits were exclusively or even predominantly masculine or feminine.

It was generally acknowledged that in an evolutionary time scale different styles of thinking may well have arisen reflecting for practical reasons the different sexual functions of men and women such as child-bearing and feeding, but it was also acknowledged that cultural forces which might at one period in the shorter historical time scale have reinforced or exaggerated these evolved gender-based polarities could also at another period de-emphasise or compensate for them. For example, it is not clear to what extent traditional male domination still means that only the best female philosophers come to public attention, as opposed to



David Clough and Carolyn Wilde

the best and second-best male philosophers.

In conclusion the group seemed to agree that, despite any evolutionary or cultural influences on polarising feminine or masculine styles of thinking or topics in philosophy, we might all benefit from taking a broader view.

We heard a brief summary of the development of visual art in the western world, illustrating how the narrative of art responds to historical cultural forces. At a time when economic power was supported by religious structures and beliefs, art was commissioned by the church or church-dominated state, and consequently provided a narrative of religious symbolism. The rise of individuals with sufficient economic power brought forth patrons who required of art a narrative of portraiture which supported their individual prestige and identity as members of the nobility. Subsequent economic growth enabled the rise of increasingly independent artists, leading to the romantic narrative of the creative genius, which increasingly incorporated the artist's own individual narrative. Developments in the means of art production such as tubes of pigment enabled outdoor painting, playing its part in the incorporation into the romantic narrative of the narrative of sublime nature. This in turn led to impressionism and post-impressionism, in which the narrative of art built on the self-awareness of the artist as the subject, to a narrative increasingly

aware of its own purely visual nature. Cubism and increasing abstraction represented an increasingly reflexive artistic narrative which deliberately made evident its own mode of construction. The growth of capitalist mass-production lead to narratives such as pop and conceptual art, which deliberately posed as a problem the question of what art is.

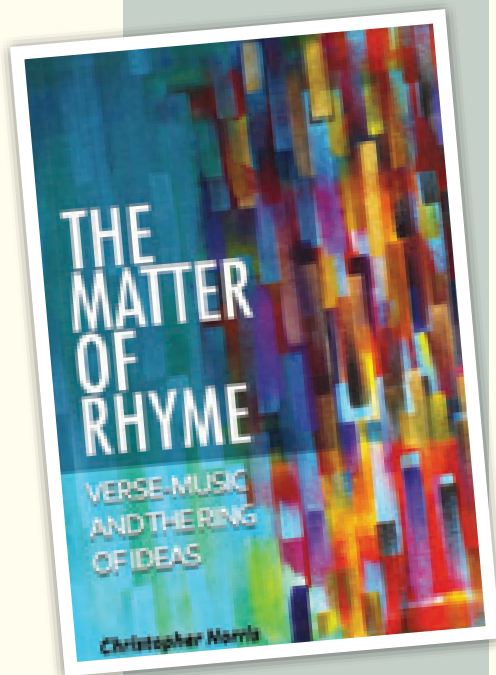
Although the above summary is highly simplified and excludes significant other developments both within and outside western culture, it provides several examples of art expressing a narrative. Other examples were considered from other forms of art. In literature and poetry any fictional narrative may merely act as a metaphor for an underlying narrative directly relevant to the reality of the reader or listener. In music or dance a composition or performance may express an emotional narrative which, whilst it may be less concrete than verbal narratives, may still be understood more or less well by the performers or audience, or indeed perceived as ringing more or less true for them. Consideration of the question as to what extent the cognitive content of art can be shared with philosophy or viewed as an alternative route to truth was not fully resolved, but taking a broader view in which scientific, philosophical, and artistic narratives all lie on a spectrum of varying degrees of precision and generality might well complement taking a broader view on supposedly feminine and masculine styles and topics of philosophy.



From left: Ray Ellison, David Burrige and Chris Seddon

The Poet and the Music

The Wednesday



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The Matter of Rhyme:
A new collection
by Chris Norris

The cultural event of the last few months is the new poetry collection by Chris Norris. It is called *The Matter of Rhyme: Verse-Music and the Ring of Ideas*. It was published by the Sussex Academic Press, Brighton and has about fifty poems. We are proud of the fact that some of these poems were published first in *The Wednesday* magazine and Chris Norris is a familiar name for our readers. The poems range over wide selection of topics and they are not always an easy read. That is why the poet gave a guide to them in the *Preface*.

The *Preface* works in a way as a manifesto. Some of it is to do with the 'verse-essay' form of poetry which Chris Norris has created in his previous collections and the dramatic verse-monologue. 'The point of verse-essay is to raise issues and debate them from one or more points of view, rather than brood poetically about them in a first-person lyrical way. The point of dramatic verse-monologue is more or less emphatically to distance the writer from the overt drift of what's written so that discussion can be carried on implicitly without (obvious) prejudice and without any (plain or forgone) conclusion.'

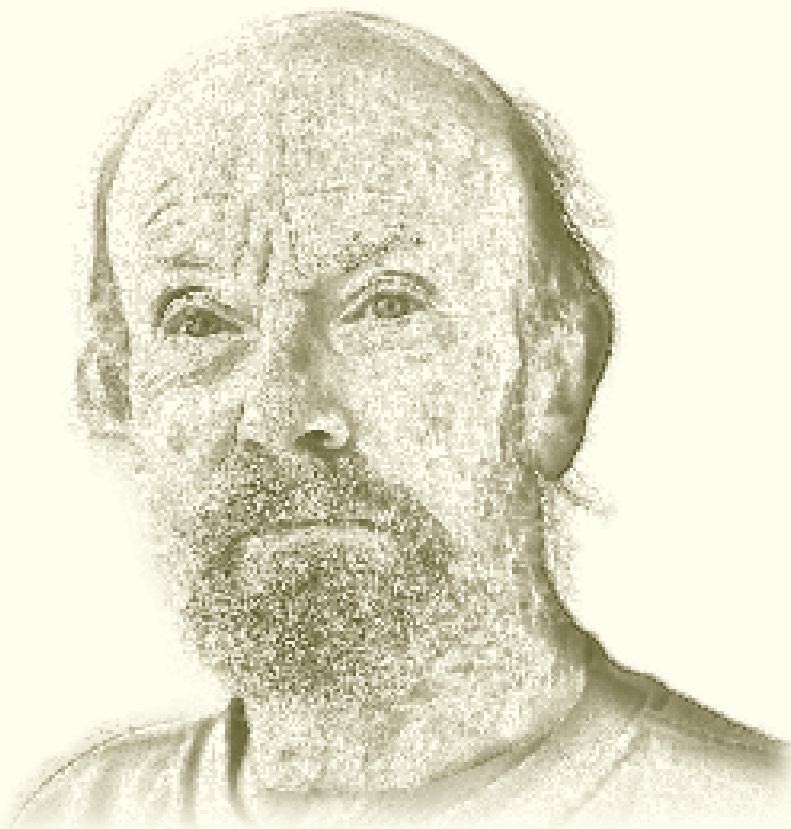
There are poems about music, ideas and occasional poems, mainly to do with political events. Subjects of the philosophical poems include: the reality or the unreality of past events, the

changing relative salience of various life-episodes, as well as taking issues with philosophers, such as Spinoza and Thomas Nagel. The point of all this is 'to do with [the] question of how far poetry can or should remain closely in touch with what goes on in the process of conscious, reflective, propositional, or deliberative thought.' It is Chris Norris's belief that: 'Rhyme and metre are great instruments of discovery and a real help in finding your way around an unfamiliar or difficult topic... they sometime force thinking onto paths remote from any that one would otherwise be likely to take in the absence of those formal constraints'.

David Clough adds:

There are some overtly political poems in the collection. Two or three on Trump or Boris Johnson leap out, but it's the music ones in the 1970s I would single out.

When Norris worked on reviews of recorded music in the 1970s he remembers the death of Shostakovich and Derek Cooke coming to Cardiff, to talk about Mahler. Like conductors (e.g. Eugene Goossens) a number of well-known music critics also wrote music. Norris mentions this in connection with Derek Cooke. When Norris writes about Derek Cooke in Cardiff (p.148), it's a long poem referring to a celebrated music critic and scholar. I once tried to read his



Chris Norris

Language of Music and how it isolated a tragic four-note descending motif in a minor key, and whether in Mahler or Britten seemed somehow like the ur-motif of tragic expression. Cooke had earlier laboured at completing the former's Tenth Symphony sixty years late as it were.

There are several other poems about music. If *Totentanz* (p.75) is about questioning Stravinsky's claim about being the vessel through which the 'rite' (of Spring) passed, the *Night Thoughts* are not with Bartok but with Shostakovich. Back to 1975, the composer had downloaded his thoughts, as we would say now, to a silent neighbour or companion like the guy upstairs in that film *'The Lives of Others'* ('I somehow know I am being listened to') where there is as much emphasis on pain-killing vodka rather than late quartets or symphonies.

Norris had contributed an essay on Shostakovich in a published symposium at the time of the controversy around Volkov's *Testimony* book which claimed all sorts of new hidden messages in Shostakovich's music particularly after the death of Stalin. Then *Wintering* with Sibelius is a long poem about his long late supposed silence when he got stuck after seven symphonies, *Tapiola* and *The Tempest* and the mystique of the destroyed eighth manuscript. Those thirty years of long winter nights. Some recent US critics, like Goss, think he should have gone to Hollywood in the 1920s like Weil and Korngold. Norris doesn't go there. But like Shostakovich ... alcohol comes into it.

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Up In Smoke



Across the black-screach sky a rocket-sear spills stars,
bangs into darkness and everyone cheers
as if someone hated had just died.

Brightness doomed to fizzle out - you know it -
that is why you are here, predetermination
always makes good entertainment.

The pyre is lit, hands joined in a circle,
faces alight as if flames dole out joy.
The guy is consumed in wreathes of blue smoke.
Pity nobody hears those long-ago screams,
or wonders why fuses are still lit.

David Burridge