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The *Wednesday*

Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

Editorial

Philosophy and the Meaning of Life

We have been discussing recently the question of philosophy and wisdom. We said that the question is related to two other sub-questions: self-transformation and the meaning of life. We dealt with the first last week and here we will discuss the second.

The meaning of life became an issue with the increased anxieties around the second millenium but has since subsided. It was the subject of several books with similar titles. The question was discussed directly or indirectly in relation to religion. The problem all these books are concerned with is how to look for meaning in a world that has lost its old certainties and old securities – mainly the post-Nietzschean 'Death of God' thesis. The discussion seems then to turn on religious belief and its replacement. Some argued positively for religion, such as in John Cottingham's book *The Meaning of Life*, while others discussed the vacuum of belief and looked for alternatives, such as in Terry Eagleton's *Culture and the Death of God* and Julian Young's *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*. These books look at the individual in search for meaning but also on the loss of meaning as a cultural condition. Some call it the 'modern condition' others call it the 'post-modern condition' with varying emphasis and assignment of blame or praise.

It is worth mentioning that there will be a conference next summer at the University of Graz, Austria on this topic. The questions that the conference will examine include:

> What is the distinction between the question of the meaning *of life* and the question of meaning *in life*? Is it possible, as many in the debate hold, to find meaning in life when there is no meaning of life? What is the meaning of meaning? Is there one unifying question / concern, or is some sort of pluralist account more accurate? What kind of value is meaningfulness? In particular, how is it to be distinguished from values such as happiness, pleasure, or well-being? Is (the existence of) God necessary for life to have meaning? Is nihilism correct? And if it is, does it matter? What are the conditions of living a meaningful life?

The solution seems to vary from the Foucault 'Care for the self' to Heidegger's *The Question Concerning Technology*. The first had its pedigree in Plato's ordered self and the road it takes from the individual self to the governing of the city. The second could be linked, or contrasted, with the Marxist diagnosis of capitalism, especially in the reading Marshal Berman gave of Modernism and Modernization and Guy Debord in his book *Society of the Spectacle*. They all deal with alienation, not only in the workplace but of humanity from its own essence. While Berman and Debord lament the shutting off of a revolutionary alternative to capitalism, Heidegger puts the blame on technology and calls for a change of attitude, personal and communal. We will look at his idea of the Festival on another occasion and contrast it with the Marxist view.

We have so far overlooked the pessimistic views of philosophers who thought that there is no meaning to life and that it is absurd to impose a meaning on life, such as Schopenhauer, Sartre and Camus. We left them out not because their views are not interesting philosophically but because of the very diagnosis that Nietzsche had of such views: that they succumb to nihilism. The question of meaning is not an easy one, but it needs hard thinking and whether it means facing nihilism, then nihilism needs to be thought through to its bitter end, as Nietzsche suggested.

The Editor

The Nature Of Philosophy

From his editorials in The Wednesday it can be seen that the editor is keenly interested in the problem of the nature of philosophy. In an age in which natural science, technology and social science are dominant, natural scientists such as the biologist Richard Dawkins and the physicist Stephen Hawking have all expressed the view that philosophy is useless and empty talk because it solves no practical problems. Before them Karl Marx pithily observed that the philosopher 'stands in the same relation to the real world as masturbation to sexual love.' I wish to show that the dismissiveness of Marx and the scientists arises from a misapprehension of the nature of philosophy.

EDWARD **GREENWOOD**

Long ago Kant recognized philosophy is not an obviously progressive discipline in the way that mathematics and the empirical sciences are. It is true that philosophers often ask questions which are also asked by non-philosophers such as whether God exists, whether there is such a thing as immortality, whether there is a criterion for deciding whether an action is good or bad and what the nature of history is. But philosophers also ask strange questions such as 'why is there something rather than nothing?' questions which non-philosophers are much less likely to ask.

Two Personalities

I want to draw attention to the valuable but not entirely satisfactory contributions to the question of the nature of philosophy by Georg Simmel and Friedrich Waismann before going on to give Wittgenstein's revolutionary view of the nature of philosophy. Simmel brings out the fact that whereas a scientist's personality and temperament need not closely enter his or her hypotheses about nature, a philosopher's temperament often does. Of course, this is not true of all philosophers. Frege's temperament enters his philosophy not at all, while Nietzsche's temperament enters his philosophy a great deal. This is partly because Frege is primarily dealing with logic whereas Nietzsche is concerned with problems of history and ethics. Indeed, perhaps Simmel was influenced in taking the view he did by Nietzsche's striking remark in section 6 of book one of *Beyond Good and Evil* that 'every great philosophy so far has been …a confession of faith on the part of its author, and a type of involuntary and unself-conscious memoir.' (Translated by Judith Norman, Cambridge, 2016, p.8). Simmel, who wrote an excellent study of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche was probably aware of the following passage from Nietzsche's *The Gay Science,* Book Five, section 345. In Walter Kaufmann's translation it runs: 'It makes the most telling difference whether a thinker has a personal relationship to his problems and finds in them his destiny, his distress, and his greatest happiness, or an "impersonal" one, meaning that he can do no better than to touch and grasp them with the antennae of cold, curious thought.' Perhaps, indeed, philosophers divide into two families here. Spinoza given his '*more geometrico'* of axioms and deductions might at first seem to belong to Nietzsche's characterization of the 'cold' philosophers, but under the bony structure of Spinoza's work lies an emotional vision.

Simmel adds, however, an important caveat. This 'personal character' in a philosopher's work is not just a matter of individual psychology. It reaches a more impersonal and objectively shareable level. It belongs to what Simmel called 'the third realm', an expression also interestingly used by the logician Got-

Georg Simmel

Peter Hacker

tlob Frege of the world of thought in general, and, in a way closer to that of Simmel's, by the literary critic F.R.Leavis in his attack on C. P. Snow in the essay 'Two Cultures'. Leavis describes 'the third realm' as 'the realm of that which is not merely private and personal nor public in the sense that it can be brought into the laboratory or pointed to.' (*Nor Shall My Sword,* Chatto and Windus, London, 1972, page 62). Simmel puts it as follows: 'There must therefore be a third something in man, beyond individual subjectivity and the logical, objective thinking which is universally convincing. And this something is the soil in which philosophy takes root.'

Trapped In The Bottle

In 1956 Friedrich Waismann published an essay with the title 'How I See Philosophy.' In it he claimed that there are no proofs or theorems in philosophy and 'no questions which can be decided, Yes or No.' This is to put the matter too strongly. Kant too was also mistaken when he said at the opening of the preface to *The Critique of Pure Reason* that reason raises questions which are beyond its power to answer, if by such questions he meant, as he has been taken to do, the question of whether God exists. If something exists, then it must have predicates and it has been shown that the predicates given to God are conceptually incoherent. What the philosopher does is to break through the misleading 'domination of linguistic forms.' By doing so philosophy gives us insight. It can use arguments, in particular the *reductio ad absurdum* and infinite regress arguments to upset rooted assumptions rising from misleading idioms and so 'build up a case' against those assumptions, as Ryle did over the vexed issue of the nature of willing. Wittgenstein showed that we do not discover what hoping, intending and understanding are by introspection and thus brought out the futility of Husserl's view of phenomenology as a sort of strict science of systematic introspection. As Wittgenstein says in *The Remarks on Colour*: 'There is no such thing as phenomenology, but there are indeed phenomenologi-

cal problems.' When our mind is tied in a knot or baffled by an *aporia*, a problem with no way out, like a fly in a bottle, to use Wittgenstein's analogy, then a philosopher may help us untangle the knot or perhaps glimpse a way out. True it is often interesting to watch the past struggles of the various flies, but we ourselves certainly do not wish to remain trapped in the bottle.

As Peter Hacker brings out in his magisterial three volume study of human nature, a philosophical problem often generates what he calls 'subtle and wonderful conceptual confusion.' (*The Intellectual Powers,* Wiley Blackwell,2013, p.309). The Wittgensteinian revolution of the twentieth century, in which he has forcefully participated, has shown that this confusion often arises from the grammatical forms of our language. Even when the confusion has been clarified, there often remains an impressiveness in the confusion itself, as with the confusion that arose from the Cartesian conception of 'consciousness' and subjectivity. The task of philosophy is to draw 'the bounds of sense' which are often hubristically violated by natural scientists themselves, recently in particular, as Peter Hacker has shown, by neuroscientists.

Gordon Baker in chapter 9 of his book *Wittgenstein's Method s*ays that Waismann's 'How I See Philosophy' is of particular interest because it is very closely based on material that Wittgenstein dictated to Waismann during the period 1931 to 1935. Though Waismann is putting a personal view as the title of his paper indicates, Baker still sees Waismann as trying to grasp the essence of philosophy. In Baker's view Waismann sees the philosopher as starting from 'a peculiar unrest,' which it is the task of the philosopher to eliminate. To use Wittgenstein's idiom the philosopher wants to 'dissolve' rather than 'solve' a problem. But I think that Baker goes on to overplay the analogy between philosophy and psychoanalysis. Wittgenstein's vision may have arisen out of his torment, but Spinoza's, say, did not, and with Locke, Hume and even Kant, we have puzzlement rather than torment.

Clarification Rather Than Explanation

Frank Cioffi, another thinker deeply influenced by Wittgenstein, in his papers in *Wittgenstein On Freud and Frazer,* Cambridge University Press,(1998) and in his essay 'Overviews: What Are They of and What are They For?' in *Seeing Wittgenstein Anew* edited by William Dray and Victor J Krebs, Cambridge University Press , (2010), has well brought out how philosophy is concerned to bring us clarification rather than explanation, and that it often does so by giving us what Wittgenstein called in section 122 of *Philosophical* Investigations an *'ubersichtliche Darstellung'* a 'surveyable representation' in Peter Hacker's translation, or overview, of something which is troubling us, whether it be a specifically philosophical problem such as the relation of thought to reality, or some terrible issue such as human sacrifice or the holocaust. These problems and issues can raise troubling reflections which transcend explanation, though we may want that too. Often, we cannot rest in our reflections. The equilibrium we achieve may be only temporary. To use a vulgar analogy, we must scratch the itch again.

Bede Rundle's book *Why there is Something rather than Nothing,* Clarendon Press, Oxford, (2004) provides a good example of how modern philosophy works and how it has, in a sense, made progress on past philosophy by becoming a problem to itself. He shows how a philosophical investigation is bound up with its own history, so to speak, and brings out why philosophy is puzzling both to the beginner in philosophy and to the non-philosopher. In his preface he points out that a problem such as why there is something rather than nothing has the capacity to set the head spinning. He starts from the cosmological problem of the origin of the universe. The cosmologist may hypothesize some material and natural cause

Friedrich Waismann

Severin Schroeder

within the universe itself. The theologian may postulate some immaterial, supernatural cause outside the universe, a divine creator. Others may say we must just accept the universe as a brute fact. But the philosopher suggests a fourth possibility, the possibility that the question is an ill formed one because it is based on a mistaken assumption. Rundle writes: 'A distinctive feature of philosophical questions lies in the way they transform under scrutiny, giving way, as the nature of the issue becomes clearer, to a series of sub-questions not obviously related to the original query. This is one reason why, to the beginners in the subject, much philosophy is found baffling, it is not evident why the issues being addressed are felt to be relevant, let alone important.' He goes on to say: 'the concepts we invoke must have a clear application, but they break down when extrapolated either to a supposedly transcendent being or to the universe itself.' In short, philosophy charts 'the bounds of sense' of any problem with which it deals. This is why compared to the great philosophical systems of antiquity and the rationalist seventeenth century and the German idealist period much of the modern analytic philosophy which has been influenced by Wittgenstein appears 'deflationary' so to speak.

Wittgenstein counters any feeling of disappointment this may arouse in sections 118 of part one of his *Philosophical Investigations.* He writes 'Where does our investigation get its importance from, since it only seems to destroy everything interesting, that is, all that is great and important? (As it were all the buildings, leaving behind only bits of stone and rubble,) What we are destroying is nothing, but houses of cards and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stand.' Wittgenstein has shown that it is part of the nature of philosophy that it be a problem to itself and why the perplexities that arise within it will be with human beings as long as they exist. Vision has not disappeared from philosophy, but it has been clarified. Indeed, as Severin Schroeder points out on pages 125=126 of his excellent book *Wittgenstein* Polity Press, (2006) 'Wittgenstein believed that a philosopher should be a poet'. He quotes Wittgenstein himself writing in section 28 of *Culture and Value:* 'I believe I summed up my attitude to philosophy by saying: really philosophy should only be written *as poetry.'* Schroeder also states in a footnote on page 126 that Wittgenstein in MS 120, 145r, compared his aesthetic attitude towards philosophy to Nietzsche's.

Ways of Self-Transformation

Thank you for another interesting issue. For what it may be worth, here are a few things that popped to mind when I read the editorial and the follow-up of issue 75 of The *Wednesday*:

RUUD SCHUURMAN
ruud.schuurman@linea-recta.com.

Indeed, 'philosophy' means 'loving wisdom'. The purpose of philosophy is not to explain what happens in the world (as most philosophers seem to believe), but to love wisdom. 'Love' in the sense of desiring to attain wisdom, and in the sense of celebrating (e.g., sharing) wisdom when attained. Rationally speaking, I believe that wisdom is equivalent to true knowledge – of which there is dreadfully little, but not just nothing at all, and that little is all that matters. Wisdom transforms all, including what you took to be yourself (i.e., it undoes the mistaken identification with the individual human being).

Yoga

Of course, the greatest tradition in self-transformation is Hinduism. The mantra of mantras is 'what am I? / I am that' (*soham / hamso*). There are many paths (*yogas*), also a path of reason (*jnana yoga*). Its method is to investigate-and-discard (*viveka-vairagya*): investigating all that you believe to be yourself (*jiva*) and discarding all that you are not (e.g., body, mind (*nama-rupa*)), until you arrive at what you are, the soul *aka* God (i.e., *atman* aka *brahman*).) In Christianity, it is called the 'via negativa'. This is a top-down method, dismantling beliefs as one proceeds.

The opposite method is to start from the bottom-up. From a true (i.e., self-evident, undeniable, indubitable, analytical necessarily, absolute true) premise (that can be known *a priori* as well as *a posteriori*) and proceed by agreed principles of reason (e.g., logic). It seems to result in what you call a system. I like this approach, and am working on three variants of it now, but it is just one of at least three methods.

The third method is the scientific method. Formulating a question (e.g., what am I?), generating hypotheses (e.g., I am my body, my brain, my mind, my soul, consciousness, being, or whatever), selecting one premise. and testing that premise against any and all (non-deflationary?) tests of truth, e.g., correspondence, coherence, virtue, etc. This is what I worked out originally – a huge work, according to my wife, my *magnum opus*. Of course, it answers the questions 'what is true?' and 'what can I know?', but also ends up answering questions like 'what is real?' and 'what am I?', as well as 'what is good?' and 'what should I do?'. So, it ends up as a scientific theory revolving around a single hypothesis. Of course, the scientific approach is only required in situations where we cannot verify a fact and we just have to settle for 'failing to falsify' the fact, and it cannot ever arrive at truth. It cannot verify a fact but only fail to falsify it. But the method is so engrained in today's culture that it may be the most adequate if your goal is to get people aboard.

So, we may feel the need for a proper bottom-up system, but 'proper' philosophy does not have to work from the bottom up. It can also work from the top down, or according to the scientific method (with a minor adjustment). Perhaps this may help to choose a suitable way forward with your team.

Reinventing the Self

Notes on the Wednesday Meetings Held on 19th of December 2018

PAUL COCKBURN

The topic we discussed was philosophy and self-transformation. The thought was expressed that self-transformation comes through looking outwards at the concerns of others and helping them. We should evaluate things in the interests of other people. Our own self is flawed. It could be that perhaps at a very basic, perhaps 'animal' level our attitude to others is either that we dominate or exploit them, or we try to help them. We try to do others harm or to do them good. Philosophers ever since Plato have been concerned with increasing goodness in the world and they suggested different ways of achieving mastery of the self.

It is difficult to change. It is easier to do so when we are young - the changes we make and undergo are very great in our youth and early adulthood! Here we have a key question: do we change because of external factors outside of us, or do we change of our own free will, because we want to? Philosophy in the last two hundred years has identified and examined many forces that limit our freedom: economic and material conditions – Marxism, unconscious factors – Freudianism, social issues – the role of culture and the State, family issues and emotional make-up – psychoanalysis. But what about our character? Do the choices we make eventually define our character? It was noted that in dire circumstances we are forced to change.

What role can religion play in helping us to transform? We can be inspired by religious leaders. As humans we imitate others, especially those we 'hero-worship'. How do we control our desires, especially harmful ones? It was noted that in the past, those with strong religious sensibilities have killed many who disagree with them. However, this is not just the domain of religion – Marxist rulers have probably killed more people than religious leaders have in the past.

Roland Barthes

Kant thought we can use our reason to change. At an artistic level, it is interesting to see how philosophers and musicians have changed in terms of their philosophy or music, often when they are older. Two philosophers who changed their views substantially during their lives were Sartre and Wittgenstein. The philosopher Deleuze thought we have more freedom when we are old!

Perhaps we have to continually re-invent ourselves. Roland Barthes wrote about old age in 1977 in his inaugural lecture at the College de France: 'my body is much older than I, as if we are always kept at the age of the social fears with which life has given us contact…. I must fling myself into the illusion that I am contemporary with the young bodies around me…. I must be periodically reborn. I must make myself younger than I am.' This is what one of our Wednesday members wants to do and we probably all echo the sentiment!

Barthes also wrote: 'There is an age at which we teach what we know. Then there comes an age at which we teach what we do not know. Then we need to forget and unlearn.'

Our dreams

Our dreams are floating fireflies
in the backdrop of words.

When you catch them, they bleed
fractal, nano-snippets that divide
and multiply in a never-ending pattern.

They are born in sunsets, crawl out of
clouds and bird nests, their whispers fall
with the raindrops, and rise with the wind
drunk on space.

They melt in thunderstorms and dry
in star-stretched dawns. As soon as you think
about them, they fade, but light up
in the dark stories the trees tell,
when you close your eyes.

Bird Dreams

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Sartre's Early and Late Philosophy

Sartre is a philosopher who seems to change his philosophy quite dramatically over time. His early philosophy and novels are different from his later work, particularly that expressed in his essay Existentialism and Humanism, written in 1948, as opposed to the philosophy expressed in Being and Nothingness (1943). Philosophers do change their views over time, but we want to see what that means for Sartre.

PAUL COCKBURN

We will look at one of his major works, *Being and Nothingness*, to trace his philosophical trajectory.

Being and Nothingness

In his book *Being and Nothingness* negation and change are primary functions of consciousness, as is questioning. We can notice a lack: if we look at the crescent moon, we know that is not the whole moon because it is not full. Sartre emphasizes that humans have the power to choose and make their own reality. Sartre's philosophy is Cartesian in the way it looks at consciousness, which he defines as 'being-for-itself', as opposed to an object, which has 'being-in-itself'.

Sartre

The human 'way of being' differs radically from that of non-conscious things. A rock or a chair neither aims towards what it is not nor attempts to negate what it is. It coincides with itself perfectly. A conscious being, by contrast, 'is what it is not and is not what it is', and it escapes, evades and negates itself at every turn. It fails to fully coincide with itself, it stands at a distance from itself.

We have to cope with our facticity, what is given to me: where I was born, what job I do, what I now am. But I can transcend these givens and I am free to choose and negate what I currently am.

Sartre talks of 'bad faith' where we attempt to evade the truth, particularly where it concerns our own freedom and responsibility. We should be 'authentic', true to ourselves, recognizing and affirming our identity and commitments. We are objects for others, the 'Other' is the being for

whom I am an object. Furthermore, 'hell is other people' – a famous Sartrean quote from his early play, '*No Exit*' (*Huis Clos* in French). In the play three characters arrive in hell. There are no flames or executioner and it turns out that hell is the three of them trapped in deadlock. They each have to rely on the way the others see them. Sartre believes we are determined by others, they limit our freedom, the gaze of the Other immobilizes us, makes us feel shame. Our common response is to treat others as objects, dominating them, trying to transform them into objects as they do to us. This is a somewhat individualistic and gloomy philosophy. If we refuse to take responsibility for our own actions, we are at the mercy of the opinion of others.

Existentialism and Humanism

Let us turn now to *Existentialism and Humanism*. Sartre is responding to critics of existentialism in this essay. He writes 'if I act, I somehow act for all men'. We are examples to others. 'A moral society, if we are to have it, must have certain values which must be taken seriously'. Sartre is by this time a Marxist, seeking a better society. He talks of his 'comrades in arms', who are free agents and who will freely decide, tomorrow, what man is then to be. 'Tomorrow, after my death some men may decide to establish Fascism…. if so, Fascism will be the truth of man, and so much the worse for us. In reality, things will be such as men have decided they shall be.' But he does not 'abandon himself to quietism', he will belong to a party, do what he can. Quietism 'lets others do what I cannot do'.

We experience anguish because of the choices we make. He gives the example of a military leader who experiences anguish as he has to work out a strategy for a battle knowing that many will die whatever he plans and orders.

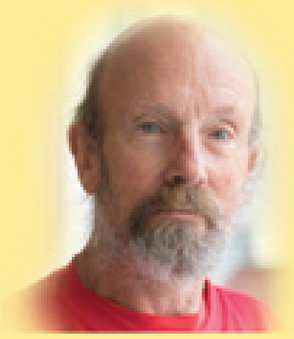
As an atheist, Sartre says we are alone, so that we have real freedom. There is no God telling us what to do. As human beings we are condemned to be free. Condemned, because we did not create ourselves, yet are nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment we are thrown into the world we are responsible for everything we do. I choose – God does not tell me what to do. We are left alone, abandoned.

Sartre gives an example of the state of abandonment – a pupil of his who came to him asking for advice in the war. His father quarrelled with his mother and he was inclined to be a collaborator. His elder brother was killed in the German offensive of 1940 and the young man wanted to avenge his brother. He had to choose between looking after his mother (who is now not living with her husband but with him) or leaving her and joining the Free French Forces. The young man ultimately has to trust his instincts, abstract values are of little use in these circumstances.

In the examples Sartre gives there is clearly a social situation in which the individual is placed, and the individual is choosing for the good of others. There is a strong ethical stance which is almost Kantian. Sartre wants a better society. This is very different from the narcissistic existentialism he was promulgating earlier in his career. And even in this essay, at the end of it he returns to his rather austere theme of freedom, making the point that at any point in our lives we can change: 'People would prefer to be born either a coward or a hero.….if you are born a coward, you can be quite content, … you will be a coward all your life whatever you do; the existentialist says that the coward makes himself cowardly, the hero heroic; and there is always a possibility for the coward to give up cowardice and for the hero to stop being a hero. What counts is the total commitment'.

But it seems the choice he makes is to a group, a party, the Marxists, which will be for the benefit of all. The individualism of his earlier philosophy is somewhat tempered! There are two strands to his philosophy of inter-subjectivity: the early individualistic one where others are more like objects, and the later more societal and political one where we should all unite.

Dupes



CHRIS **NORRIS**

The entire method consists in the order and arrangement of the things to which the mind's eye must turn so that we can discover some truth.

René Descartes, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (1628)

Starting with Freud, the unconscious becomes a chain of signifiers that repeats and insists somewhere (on another stage or in a different scene, as he wrote), interfering in the cuts offered it by actual discourse and the cogitation it informs.

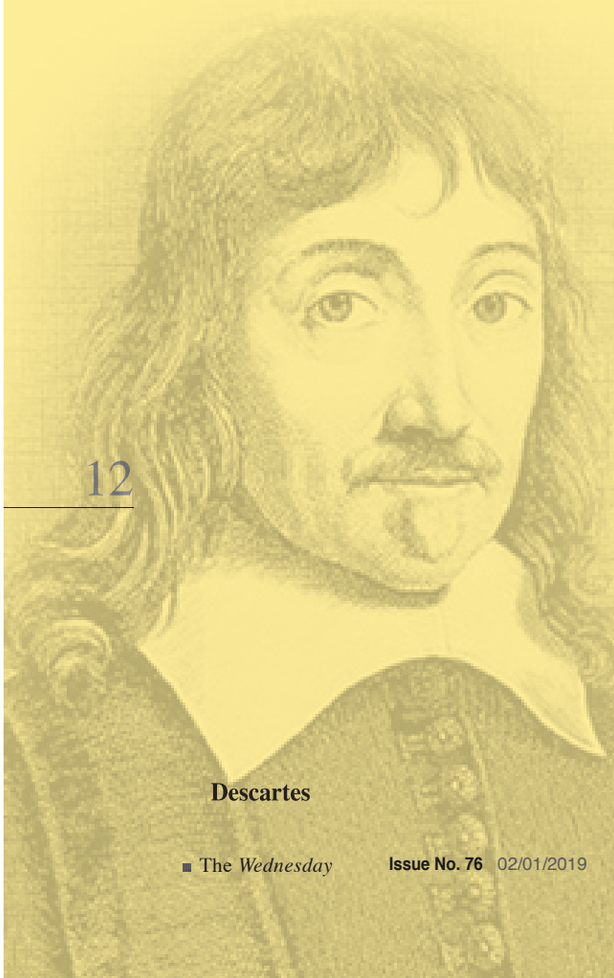
Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (full English trans., 2007)

'I think, therefore I am', Descartes decreed.
Self-evident: no need to verify!
Voiced inwardly the words rang true and clear.
Who'll question this indubitable thought?

For scepticism here's the cure we need,
A proof that stands distinct to the mind's eye,
And answers, safe within its Ego-sphere,
All questions cross-referred to reason's court.

Source apodictic, outcome guaranteed:
Mere logic shows the nostrum must apply,
That doubts, like bucks, must finally stop here,
With *cogito* our first and last resort.

Let sceptics quit the scene: no case to plead!
Just saying all's in doubt won't get them by.
Locked on to this, our one sure route to steer
Through seas unfathomed, we'll come safe to port.



Descartes

Yet what if it's a text they all misread,
Those self-assured Cartesians who rely
On reason's claim to make the thing appear
A statement of the *a priori* sort?

So Lacan counsels: pay the text more heed,
Track errant signifiers as they fly
The signified, and treat such talk of sheer
Self-evidence as fit for Freudian sport.

Again: don't ask yourself 'Where might they lead,
Those trails of sense?', but 'whither now the "I"
Of Descartes' shifty narrative, that mere
Place-holder always primed to self-abort?'

What if the *cogito* just serves to feed
Sir Ego some mendacious alibi
While, unawares, he crosses the frontier
To Id's night-school where riddling truths are taught?

Then we'd not think of signifiers keyed
To signifieds, or take as read the tie
Of meaning to intent, or the idea
That pint-pot signs each token one half-quart.

Let's then conclude, with Lacan, that indeed
Freud's lesson goes: 'just where I think that my
Self-grounding *cogito* has Ego's ear,
That's where Id's stratagems cut reason short

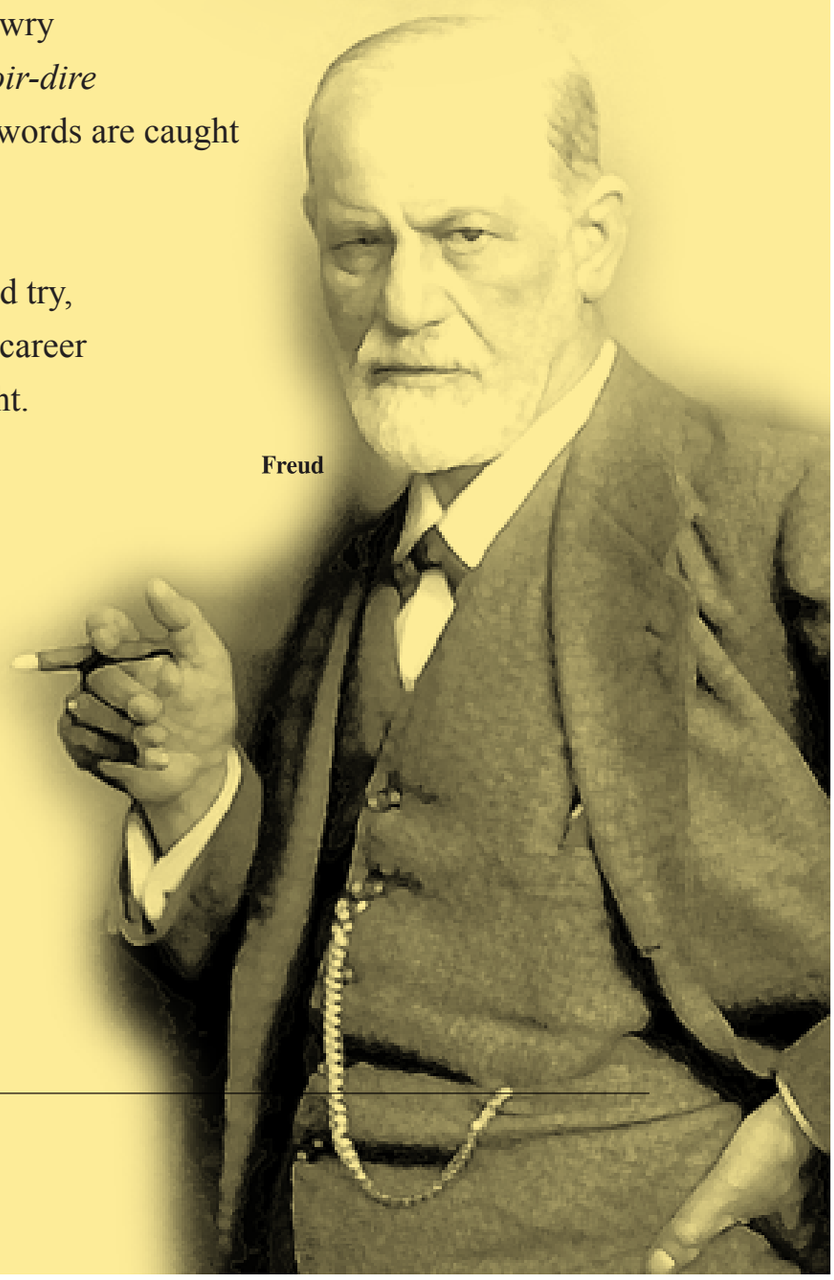
Lacan

Since thanks to them, from such illusions freed,
Our Id-like alter ego may defy
The old Cartesian voice that tells us we're
Least duped when it's those stratagems we thwart'.

Rather the sense-glissade is something we'd
Best ride as Id directs and not deny
('*Les non-dupes errent*'), though Ego bids us fear
That life and love are what it brings to naught.

For, 'mean it' as we may, there's still the *vide*
De sens that twists all plain intent awry
Yet tells us straight: wherever *vouloir-dire*
Goes off the rails, that's where our words are caught

In vectors of desire that far exceed
The path-coordinates of those who'd try,
With Descartes, to arrest their wild career
By daylight clarity too dearly bought.



Freud

Notes:

'*Les non-dupes errent*': one of Lacan's punning aphorisms conveying/ suggesting (roughly) 'the Name(s) of the Father' and that 'those most in error are those who pride themselves on not being duped'.

vide de sens: absence, lack or emptying-out of sense

vouloir-dire: will-to-say, expressive intent

Seasonal Greetings from the Editor

The Wednesday magazine and all members of the Wednesday group wish our readers a very happy and prosperous New Year.

About this time last year, we celebrated six months of the life of a new publication, The Wednesday magazine, with an Iraqi dinner at the Masqouf restaurant in London, just off the Edgware Road. Two weeks ago, we celebrated a year and a half of the life of the magazine with a larger group at Café Rouge restaurant, Oxford.

The dinner was a good occasion for members and friends to relax from serious discussions after our weekly Wednesday meeting at the nearby Opera Café. The group has worked hard throughout the year to prepare topics for discussion and writing up for the weekly issues of the magazine, as well as offering poetry and artwork. It has been their efforts and the many friends outside Oxford which have made it possible for the magazine to continue. I am very grateful to you all.

Time is not measured by the clock but by achievements and the magazine, its team and friends have achieved a lot in the last year and a half. This gives us a feeling of happiness and confidence about the future.

On behalf of The Wednesday team I wish you all a Happy New Year.

Rahim Hassan

The ***Wednesday***

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Conjuring Belief

A sleight of hand, a shift of glimpse.
He leans towards us, declares his challenge.
Shuffles the pack, offers a secret:
card picked and pocketed.
You think he can never know.
You sign it then release it,
to what you think is surely random.

He swears his belief. Smiles you in.
Tells you that he can never know.
Then out of his pocket he shares his secret.
Your choice found again.
How did he know?

You want to believe in a spell,
but know he is cleverer than you thought.
Crumple the card and keep it close.

You say to yourself: don't spill the beans.
Belief is easy to contain;
knowing is always heavy to handle.

David Burridge

The *Wednesday* – Magazine of the Wednesday group.
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