

The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

Editorial

Thinking The Alternatives

We discussed last week the meaning of life in the context of technology. We saw that Heidegger enlisted the help of the Greek language and philosophy to suggest a way of conceiving a technology that is in harmony with art. It reminds me of Nietzsche's idea of a Socrates (theoretical knowledge and science) who plays music. However, this connection with Nietzsche leads, unexpectedly, to the thought of the Marxist critic Guy Debord. Some comments on Debord's book *The Society of the Spectacle* suggest that the idea of the spectacle comes from Nietzsche and not from Marx. Never mind the details, Debord is a more daring developer of Marx's ideas in *Das Kapital* than most previous Marxists thinkers.

Debord sees technology as a man-made force that became an independent reality in control of human's reality. It has pervaded every aspect of the individual's life and society. It has created a society of appearances where reality has been substituted by images. As he said: 'The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images.' The spectacle for him is the 'complete inversion of life...the autonomous movement of the non-living.' The mark of the technological society of late capitalism is the total commodification and alienation of life, including space, time and human relationships. The media and communication promote the aims of the spectacle. The individual and society go to sleep in this falsely constructed life and consciousness.

But what is the solution to the technological, capitalist society of the spectacle? Debord is not revolutionary in the traditional Marxist way, although there is a connection with the May student revolution of '68. His solution is more aesthetic and artistic, given his relationship with the Situationist Movement and his work in films and literary journals. The Situationists called for creating situations where one could escape the society of the spectacle and come into genuine relationship with other humans and life. If

the spectacle is distorting consciousness, much as Marxists talk about false consciousness, then the answer is to break through the image.

Maybe knowingly or unknowingly, Debord considers the idea of the festival that Heidegger saw as the solution to a society alienated from nature and human life, but warns against valorising the festival if it becomes another image (spectacle). Debord says:

'In the exuberant life of the Italian cities, in the art of the festival, life is experienced as enjoyment of the passage of time. But this enjoyment of passage is itself a passing enjoyment.'

He adds again:

'The epoch which displays its time to itself as essentially the sudden return of multiple festivities is also an epoch without festivals. What was, in cyclical time, the moment of a community's participation in the luxurious expenditure of life is impossible for the society without community or luxury. When its vulgarized pseudo-festivals, parodies of the dialogue and the gift, incite a surplus of economic expenditure, they lead only to deception always compensated by the promise of a new deception. In the spectacle, the lower the use value of modern survival-time, the more highly it is exalted. The reality of time has been replaced by the advertisement of time.'

What Debord condemns here is what Heidegger saw already – that there is a difference between taking time off work and a genuine festival. For both thinkers, the solution seems to be a change of attitude rather than opposing technology. Tragically, Debord went too far in his solution, becoming an alcoholic and eventually committing suicide! This calls for other alternatives which we may discuss in future issues.

The Editor

The Primal Paradox

There was first unity and harmony in Being until consciousness came on the scene. Consciousness separated knowledge from life. There is a relationship between the self and Being. What is this relationship? If an active universal creative impulse initiated the cosmos out of a state of Being then there is a connection through this creative Being to 'myself'. What essentially is myself? What about the divided brain theory?

If self-consciousness finds a harmony with unity, then the tension within the primal paradox should recede or even dissolve. Apparent independence is maintained within a greater unity. Here lies the root of the primal paradox: separation within connection.

The vision of the original unity is recoverable through poetry and mystical experience.

WILLIAM BISHOP



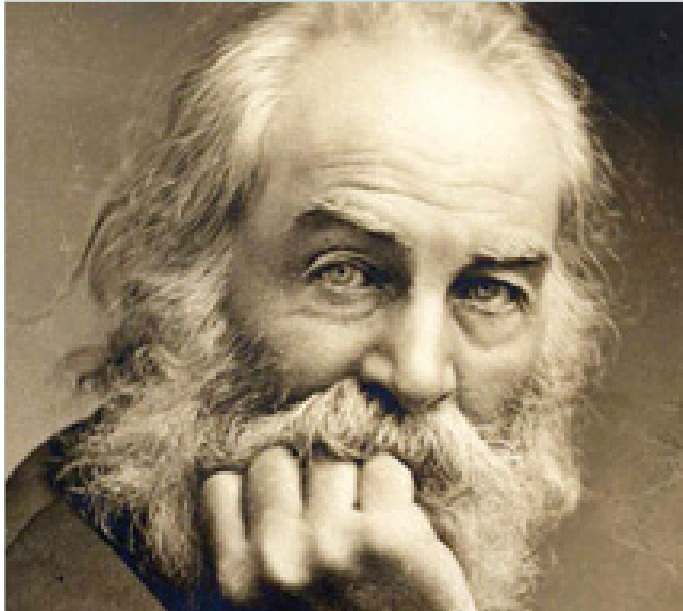
*'I celebrate myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good as
belongs to you.'*

This is the exuberant way Walt Whitman opens his poem *Song of Myself*. It is almost as if Whitman, in speaking of atoms in common, is leaping ahead of himself to the age of quantum mechanics where particle interconnection seems undeniable, and where a self could be seen as a movement or a moment within an over-all moment of movement.

Such a poem arises from a state of wellbeing, if not ecstasy. Had Whitman felt ill his thoughts would have been different, assuming he would have wanted to voice them. The sentiments of cosmic universalism contained in this poem also appear to emerge from the fact that Whitman transcends his small personality as

Whitman so that 'myself' becomes more like a pure centre of perception, consciousness and feeling. Instead of being distanced from the world by his personality, he is therefore able to connect with his whole environment. The poem appears to arise from a mystical experience of oneness, transcending the personality yet concerning the deeper identity of the self. Myself as *I* and *that* as other are no longer experienced as separate and in opposition but connected at the deepest level of self. The experience is 'I am that'.

But what is this deeper level of self? It is where self can be understood as a verb rather than a noun. It is active and not to be pinned down to a static entity. If an active universal creative impulse initiated the cosmos out of a state of Being then there is a connection through this creative Being to the 'myself' of Walt Whitman. The living quality of Being



Walt Whitman



Kitaro Nishida

determines that the 'I' partakes of a living soul where the individual 'I' finds connection with the universal *I am*. New Testament scripture characterizes this particularly well: 'I am the vine and you are the branches.' Now the vine is something living, a tree of life, and the branches gain their living quality from connection to the vine.

What exactly is this identity between individual self (branches) and universal self (vine)? What essentially is myself? Although characteristics can be documented, it does look like the 'I' as an actual identity is active, a verb, and cannot be fixed in place merely by means of characteristics. It is living and real.

Consciousness and Being

In sacred Western cosmology, unity characterizes primal Being before the beginning, but with creation came the two and the many. Even so, the single self of Being could be intuited as multiplying while remaining one. Fast forward to today with some seven billion-plus individual selves in the world then the primal paradox becomes

hugely multiplied. Self-consciousness is defined by awareness of separation, though it still remains possible to be in unity with the flow of the world and cosmos. If self-consciousness finds a harmony with unity, then the tension within the primal paradox should recede or even dissolve. Apparent independence is maintained within a greater unity. Here lies the root of the primal paradox: separation within connection. The difficulty is that what is separate can only maintain and magnify its separate identity at the expense of awareness of connection to the whole.

The sense of separateness is emphasized when the conscious self takes the onlooker stance: self-consciousness splitting unity into subject and object - I and it. Arguably, in times preceding the ancient Greek culture when *self-conscious* development became evident, the sense of unity with the whole was maintained by means of a participatory consciousness where there was little feeling of a personal self - an 'I' - to intervene, and where the individual person felt identity with the group and unity with the external world. The analogy here is

with the very young child before developing self-consciousness - the 'I' - at around the age of three. Onlooker consciousness, which is our contemporary norm, tends to magnify the sense of separateness, and yet it is still possible to release oneself from this holding position.

There are a number of ways of achieving this release. One involves taking a holistic view, employing the methods of phenomenology and cognition by means of feeling, intuition and the exercise of the faculty of imagination. This was an approach pioneered by Goethe who, surprisingly enough, considered his activities as a natural scientist more important than his celebrated literary output. This approach tries to suspend intellectual judgment while feeling one's way into the phenomena. It is a highly artistic method in contrast to the analytic intellectual approach favoured by normative science. Thinking is involved but in the living form of feeling and imagery which seeks to connect to the living quality within the phenomenon. This is where the significance lies: it is a method that tries to connect the vitality within the subject with the living quality in the object. This can be understood according to the theory of prioritizing the right lobe of the brain (immediacy) over the left (analysis into a fixed, deadened, form).

While the great scientific enterprise fuelled by the dominant analytical left-brain has achieved incredible results, its one-sidedness appears likely to lead to devastating results for humanity. An alternative (or supplementary) scientific approach, with sensitivity to the qualities of living forces, has so far been overshadowed and even overlooked, though it offers solutions to knowledge at a holistic level. Finally, the primal paradox - the contradiction of being a separate self and yet wholly connected to an outside world - is a question of knowledge: epistemology. What appears to be a paradox at one level of understanding is not a paradox when seen in a different context. For example, in Vedic ontology the 'I' of

Atman is comprehended as identical with the encompassing 'that' of Brahman. Multiple identities derive from the One while retaining identity with it. I am separate as an entity and yet part of the whole. I am a nodule within the flow where the flow is primal, and I am contingent within its enablement. There is no contradiction: difference requires underlying identity - I/thou, I/we, I/all that. Arguably the solution to the apparent contradiction of the primal paradox can be found at the source and origin where the One becomes multiple.

There is a sense in which the 'I' only exists when it is in action (even if the action is in thinking) and doesn't exist as a thing. It is this being-quality that gives connection with what lives beyond its own boundaries as a human being. The difference between this 'I' as myself in being, and the thingness of myself, is brought out in a comparison of a living person with its corpse. The difference is the being of the 'I'. The corpse emphasizes the absence of being, but even in the living person that being is hard to pin down. Rather it is easier for another living person to sense through its own qualities the quality of another being.

The images of the *Tree of Knowledge* and the *Tree of Life* are key here. Intellectual knowledge requires the distancing of the subject from the content of knowledge, while the *Tree of Life* is concerned with the vitalizing dimension in an endeavour to make connections. Arguably, we have the mythical fruit or the roots of these trees in our brain as the left and right lobe delicately connected to each other. Civilization in the West appears to have over-emphasized the *Tree of Knowledge* during the last few hundred years at the expense of the living dimension of the *Tree of Life*. The *Tree of Knowledge* and *Life* need each other; for knowledge without life is dead and life without knowledge lacks meaning. It is as if knowledge and life are two separate worlds that meet but not always on equal terms within our world. Walt Whitman's *Song*



Tree of Knowledge

of Myself is obviously generated from the life sphere and it appears that knowledge has been patched in as the life-energy progressed.

It is deeply important here to recognize that life itself operates on the basis of opposites, which energize each other by their opposition. Seeing from the perspective of the *Tree of Life* allows us to recognize the essential unity in these oppositions. But seen only through the eye of the *Tree of Knowledge* these oppositions appear contradictory or even paradoxical. This is something acknowledged in Hegel's philosophy which grew from the roots of the Romantic Movement (or Romantic rebellion) in late eighteenth century Europe.

The Japanese philosopher Kitaro Nishida appears to dissolve the primal paradox by combining Western philosophy with Zen to reveal that the subject-object split can be bridged by living experience (intuition). It is this living dimension that I'm trying to express but which so easily escapes the fixity of language. Indeed, along the main highway of contemporary science, life still remains a great mystery, and seems to be better explored

by poets, artists and some philosophers and practitioners of spiritual paths. The great paradox today though is the continuation in separate gardens of the *Tree of Knowledge* and the *Tree of Life* when the common bond between them needs only to be acknowledged and employed in both the pursuit of knowledge and life.

Recognizing that 'I am' is in the 'I', or that 'I' is in 'I am', is not sufficient as a conceptual insight to make any consequential difference. For this to make a consequential difference there has to be recognition at the living level, perhaps equivalent to a mystical experience of union. Breaking through the barrier of the primal paradox as a contradiction could be the next move that humanity needs to make if survival is to become more than a brave old world of manipulation and illusion. It takes a heart to cognize the whole in the part and the heart in the whole, which includes the part. For the intellect the primal paradox is a problem; but for the heart it is a generative tension within which it can live, and in a sense, by which it lives.

Is Philosophy for The Elite?

The recent article by Edward Greenwood on The Nature of Philosophy (in The Wednesday, issue 76, 2nd January 2019), interesting as it is, outlines an idea of philosophy which encourages many responses and calls to consider some alternative options.

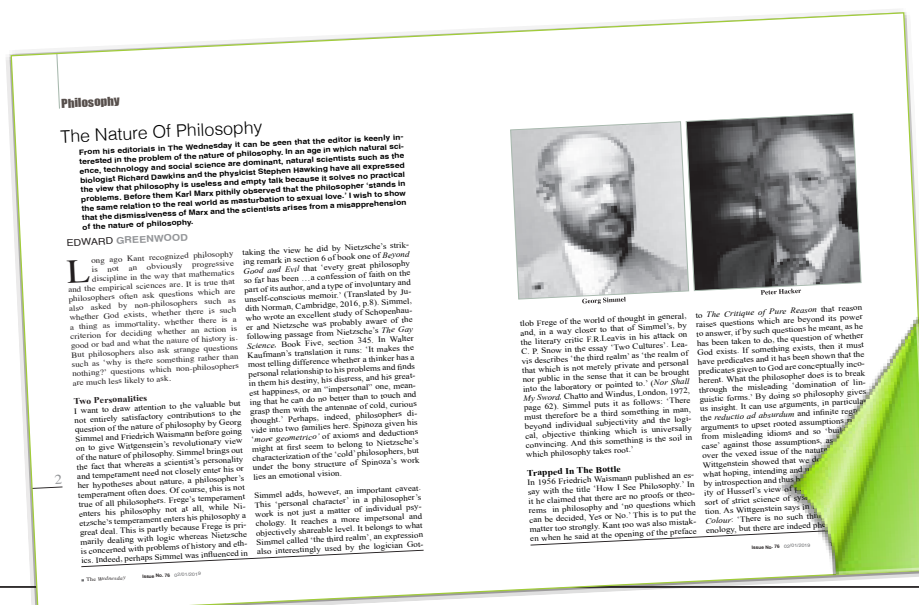
LIVIO ROSSETTI

First let me devote at least few words to an idea of philosophy that has been almost forgotten, but which was the very first one, as it had some circulation in Athens between ca. 440 and 390 BCE, i.e. in the time of Socrates. This was when Plato still had to concoct *another* idea of philosophy, his own (which is, after all, our own). In those old times, it became rather widespread to evoke *philosophhein* (philosophizing) and *philosophia* (philosophy) with reference to the most brilliant minds, esp. those showing speed of reasoning and talking and, consequently, a special ductility of opinion (as in Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen*, § 13). This was a philosophy related ‘to the leisure to pursue thoughts, the adventures of mind, the welfare of those who do not concern themselves with only the most urgent needs but who can gain satisfactions that are purely intellectual.’ (from a paper of mine included in Stavru & Moore eds., *Socrates and the Socratic Dialogue*, Leiden-Boston 2018, p. 276). This was notably a philosophy without an institutional basis as well as without philosophers.

Plato, on the other hand, at a certain phase of his career, began to speak a lot of philosophy and *philosophoi* (philosophers), by stressing the importance of what philosophers are able to know (the Ideas, to begin with). All in all, his was a cognitivist idea of philosophy, with an important place granted to those who know. It is not by chance that, after some 24 centuries, it occurred to Mr. Greenwood to begin his paper by remarking that ‘philosophers ... ask strange questions ... which non-philosophers are much less likely to ask’. One could add: they ask, and usually provide a generous offer of answers.

Emphasis on the availability of well-argued answers lies behind a bizarre feature of our times, when even philosophers are distinguished as to whether they are undergraduates, graduates, university professors or great scholars. Events for undergraduates are not to be mistakenly taken for events to which only graduates are admitted. And how does one graduate? Not unlike what happens in a host of other fields of specialization,

6



philosophers succeed in getting their own degrees by giving a convincing evidence of their ability to deal competently with at least some sophisticated questions, have at least an 'accepted' monograph in preparation, have been allowed to read papers in some reputed conferences, have authored one or more 'substantial' articles, etc.

Clearly, not everything is OK in this profile, according to which philosophy became a 'work', a specialization, a career of its own. It has nothing to do with personal wisdom, nothing to do with the opinions of 'lay' persons, nothing to do with life in society (unless their field of specialization deals precisely with public affairs, democracy and so on). It has no interest in the tentative organisation of one's own experience, in one's personal encyclopaedia, in one's own system of values, i.e. in the admittedly provisional quadrature of the circle each of us normally try to reach and adjust every day – a 'private' way of philosophizing in order to limit the range of confusion, incoherence, mental disorder, loss of contact with reality: in a word, in order to be more comfortable with one's self. Now Plato's emphasis is on who is (or may become) a philosopher, and the sort of knowledge to which only philosophers are presumed to have access. They know and have impressive skills.

In the meanwhile, the range of topics dealt with by philosophers expanded immensely, so that now if you ask what precisely philosophers study, or know, you get the same answer several mathematicians used to give, namely that mathematics is what mathematicians currently do. No better definition is available. In these conditions, the bridge between the philosophy of philosophers, and everyday life, can only increase its span.

Alternative Ways Of Philosophising

Happily, we are not without alternatives. Let me outline just one of them. For two or three decades now, philosophy with children has become part of our lives here and there. I remember a couple of parents going to the director of their child's primary school in order to deplore the fact that: 'our nephew (our child's cousin) does philosophy, while our baby does not. Inconceivable! Please change this state of affairs as soon as possible!' – with the poor director confessing: 'True?! I hadn't the least idea of that, but I will try to get some information on it.' Which sort of philosophy?

It was originally thought you could only offer to pupils from primary schools elementary philosophy they can easily understand. Happily enough, there are alternatives to so bad a line of action. For example, there are frequent occasions where pupils are allowed to exchange ideas on a given topic (e.g. justice/injustice or God) and pay heed to them with the greatest attention. They will hardly say memorable things, but they will see how other pupils put the same matter, and their minds experience something, never heard before from teachers, parents, grandparents or priests, being quietly said by one of their peers. This way the range of what is at least conceivable expands and expands even without stressing anything.

This way, do they begin to philosophize? Yes, exactly. They begin to re-organize their own collection of opinions (from their own experience), and perhaps their own inchoate system of values as well as their own idea of what to do. What is more, their minds receive a definite help against a tremendous danger for children: forms of precocious atrophy of their minds.

Now suppose that an accomplished philosopher regularly devotes herself to these events, with her role consisting almost just in paying attention to a group of children, and certainly not in exhibiting her immensely superior competence. Does she waste her time this way? Please ask her, if you can. She is probably *becoming* different in *her* ideas because of what she had the privilege to observe. In a sense, *her own* tendential atrophy, because of her over-exposure to academic philosophy, is likely to begin to loosen and disband.

Well, my claim is that to do something of the sort at least for a while is almost a need for professional and would-be philosophers. It is one of the best ways to remain/become nearer to genuine philosophy. For, not to be prepared to experience something of the sort would mean that they are satisfied to be (or become) professors of philosophy, not accomplished philosophers. Indeed, a cognitivist idea of philosophy has occupied the field and obscured many non-cognitivist virtuositities of *philosophiein*. It is a pity, in my opinion, because it implies a too narrow idea of what philosophy is for everybody, and me personally. Graduates in philosophy are dangerous, at least if their cognitivist features end up occupying every space.

Thinking Philosophically Is Like Cooking Soup

DAVID BURRIDGE

Of course, there are the a-priori elements of soup cooking. The heat, the pan, the water that one uses. Without these to hand there would be no basis for continuing with the recipe. There will be no argument that the water will be heated to enable the ingredients to blend and cook and to ensure that a particular taste will emerge and that, arguably there will be an estimable nutritional value to the result. Of course, the delicacy of taste will be contentious but I will return to this issue.

When we come to choose and combine the ingredients then we are dealing with A-posteriori truths. Of course I could lean back and rely on a simple Hume recipe – just cook in accordance with custom and practice. That might of course be the only way the final plateful will be generally selected, or warrant being even called a soup. But I prefer to extend the boundaries of experience and extend my knowledge of particular ingredients to create a perfect **slurp**.

Using inductive reasoning I will select each spice, understanding how it tastes on its own, then seek

to combine with other spices to reach a higher dimension of taste which I believe will result.

Of course the analyst will say everything should be precisely measured to achieve a viable result. But I like to sniff and pinch as I lean over the bubbling pan. It may be described as a phenomenological process. It might be argued that I am relying on my own perception to feed others. I can already hear the Marxists shifting in their seats.

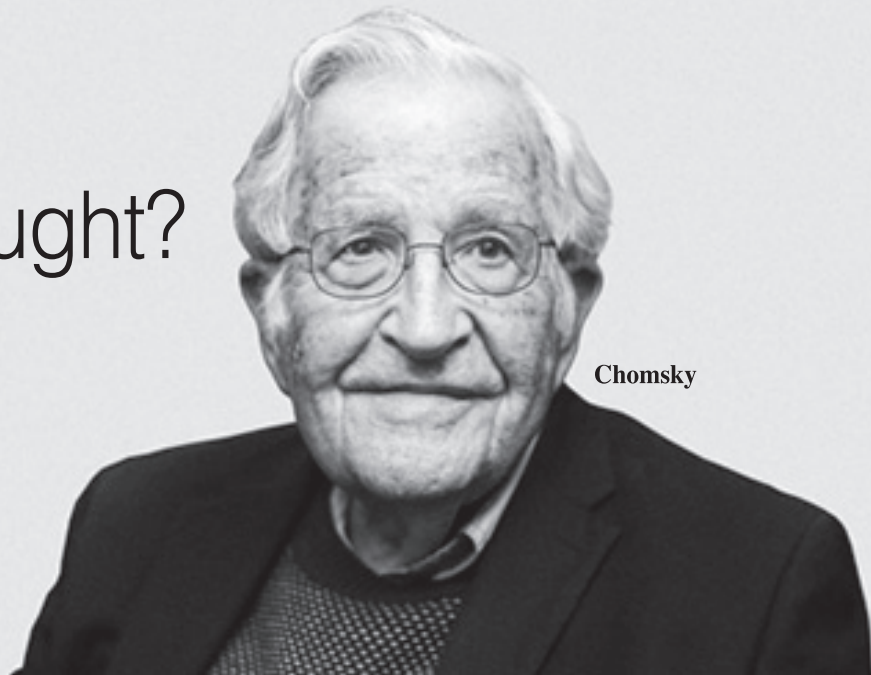
Of course whatever invention occurs in the pan, like any concept, it will only have value when it is tested in practice. In this case when it is dished up to potential tasters. Supposing they all spit it out and screw up their faces. Do I simply throw it out and order a pizza on-line? Perhaps I should consider the motives of the invited guests. Perhaps they are only prepared to guzzle what they have always guzzled. The metaphysics of my soup may be that it has taste value which is beyond current **slurpers'** capabilities and needs to be put in the freezer until the day when a new order of **slurpers** inhabits the dining rooms.



What is a Thought?

*Notes of Meeting Held on
Wednesday 2nd January 2019*

PAUL COCKBURN



Chomsky

We discussed thoughts. What is a thought? It is an elusive concept. Does it need language? Where does the thought come from? Nietzsche said that he summoned the thought. Descartes said it came on its own terms. Does a thought require language? Perhaps. A thought is an event of language (or a happening in a language.) But where is this language: is it in the mind (innate, Chomsky)? Or in the world (empiricism, Putnam)? Or in a third realm? How do we judge our thoughts to be true? perhaps a thought is an event of truth. But not every thought is true! However, assuming this thought is true, what is truth? Is it in the world (Correspondence)? Is it in the mind (Coherence)? Or in a third realm? Where do we stand in relation to a thought? Are we the masters, and our thoughts the slaves? Or is the order reversed? Should our thoughts be pragmatic, centred on the world, dependent on empirical verification?

A lot of questions! We thought our thoughts are often too traditional and get stuck in ruts. This means we need new concepts. But we are often afraid to open new doors, pursue new thoughts. One view was that our thoughts should be pragmatic, and that there is a structure to the world which we can understand and discover. But why is the world structured and not random? Is it just mirroring the structure that is in us? In medieval times

it was believed the link between us and the world was guaranteed by the Divine creator. Many no longer believe this, but they do still believe there is structure out there!

In terms of language, Wittgenstein believed that confused concepts arise from the grammatical form of our language. (See Edward Greenwood's excellent article on the nature of philosophy in Issue 76 of *The Wednesday*). We can 'dissolve' problems in our heads so to speak. But does this lead to quietism, where we in effect ignore the outside world? We thought that as individuals, we are never all going to agree. But we value dialogue. We should look at the opposite point of view rather than dismissing it. For instance, it is perhaps good for a religious person to read Nietzsche. Being looked at from the outside is good, more insightful in some way: the insiders paper over the cracks.

One thought was that in the past there were distinct powerful grand narratives and ideologies. Now there is too much dispersion, categories are too blurred, ideologies too fractured. Identities in the modern world are fluid, so we should be more aware of the dangers of 'pigeonholing' people.

A lot of questions! Of course, we could not settle any of these, but they made us think.....

Too Late

In a rich wetland redolent of spring,
deep in the reeds, their spikes lit by the sun
a herd of Tyrannosaurus Rex enjoys an early run.

Corseted in their folds, armoured in scales,
their claws securely anchored they reach out
in unison. Their chatter is about

the weather, one is scanning clouds,
the other chirps about the tales
of climate change, one manicures its nails.

No harm can penetrate this safe stockade,
They all enjoy a warm and spring-clean world,
were it not for the sudden rocks that hurled

across the sky and grew like a cascade
of enemy invaders from up high.
It was too late to even blink an eye



or say good bye to all the living chorus.
A 112 mile crater is all that's left to us.
Look under 'Yucatan' in the Thesaurus.

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Contemplation of The Inverted Tower of Babylon

The Mythological and Religious Context

Last month the sculpture 'INVERSOBABEL' won the European Court of Justice's art competition. The sculpture highlights and celebrates multilingualism. Below, the artist explains his vision and the symbolism he used, invoking both mythology and religion.

ALAN XUEREB

The Tower of Babel was mentioned in Genesis 11:1-9 is an origin myth meant to explain why the world's peoples speak different languages. It is the possible mythological birth of the need for multilingualism.

Multilingualism, in post-postmodernity, has proved to be the prevailing human condition. Various approaches have been applied to fully embrace the advantages of multilingualism and to come to terms with its challenges.

The Philosophy Of Multilingualism

There are a number of approaches addressing multilingualism from different vantage points. The development of thought towards understanding phenomena of human reality does not proceed in a straight ascending line. It is not the case that one approach strictly follows another; rather, several approaches exist in parallel, with some more prominent than others in particular periods.

The philosophy of multilingualism focuses on a dominant, defining trait of the human condition, in which multiple languages are deployed and intensively shape the postmodern world. Much of the work undertaken by philosophers of language is of minimal relevance to the philosophy of multilingualism, because the interest of philosophers of

language is the nature of language and its relationship to meaning, concepts and reality. In contrast, multilingualism, as an academic subject, embraces not only fields connected with language, but also necessarily involves psychology, sociology, ethnology, ethnography, globalisation studies, urban studies, material culture studies, and many others.

From Conceptualisation to Expressionism

In multilingualism, the term 'conceptualisation' is suggested as an umbrella term embracing a number of methodologies that have evolved gradually, growing exponentially in recent years. Thus, conceptualisation is both an approach and a methodology. Conceptualisations differ in their points of departure and their scope. The broadest perspective on multilingualism is attained by ascending to the philosophical level. In other studies, the concept of space-time is put forward to accommodate the multi-layered structure of communication in multilingual settings.

This concept, used in philosophy, physics, and of late in sociology, treats the three spatial dimensions (length, width, height), and one temporal dimension (time) as a single abstract universe. A *spacetime of multilingualism* is a multidimensional cross-section of reality



The 'INVERSOBABEL'
(A mixed media - sculpture
by Alan Xuereb / Malta)

in reference to a speaker or speakers, the languages involved, and the environment, in which time is its essential dimension. The interaction between the many elements of each space-time makes it unique. Accordingly, the understanding of multilingualism becomes more realistic and more attuned to the diversity and unpredictability of each particular sociolinguistic situation.

All this it is submitted, may be expressed visually in this reality, in this space-time, here and now through art – in all its forms. I chose a four-dimensional object to represent multilingualism because, in my opinion, it best interprets this idea of 'conceptualisation', which is both an approach and a methodology. Why? Because expressionism is about what the artist feels and wants to express, and I feel that the mass of a 4-dimensional object leaves an imprint in space-time that cannot be neglected. It is visible. It hits you, positively or negatively, but it has an impact on you!

I also chose the name 'INVERSOBABEL', because, I believe that what in the *Old Testament* was perceived as a curse, nowadays, is being considered as a blessing. Having diversity of languages with different shades and nuances enriches the human experience. This enrichment does not confound reality nor does it confuse it as previously (mythologically) thought. The diversity of languages, when properly interpreted as a concept and properly implemented and managed as a tool, may help to push our human civilisations forward. As I see it, from this divine curse hurled on humanity, the latter found a new way of doing things. Humanity, with all its flaws, conflicts and paradoxes, has found a way to embrace its destiny and transform that which should have 'confounded' its collective mind into a whole new philosophy - A whole new societal arrangement. A multilinguistic one.

The Sculpture Itself – ‘Inversobabel’

Although a follower of expressionism in its most abstract form, I felt the need to deviate from my usual use of strong colours and bold brush strokes on canvas and produce, as already mentioned, a piece that somehow alters space-time with its mass.

The Inverted Tower

The tower is a symbol of power and arrogance. The tip of the tower is normally the site of main authority. Presumably, that is why God, in the *Old Testament* felt it as an affront to his omnipotence and cursed the postdiluvian peoples with many tongues. The main inverted tower symbolises the reversal of the curse of Babel. What once was a curse has become a blessing. Humanity does not need to build a tower to reach the heavens anymore, anyway! The central monolith of confounding tongues has turned into a podium on which ‘unity’ (symbolised by the sphere) rests blissfully and peacefully. The foundations of the inverted tower (symbolised by the flat circular part of the conical structure), becoming an “altar”, offers that which humanity has best to offer – its diversity and ingenuity! The rugged look of the tower expresses the passage of time – the fourth dimension.; the experiences acquired throughout the millennia. Like neurons in a human brain the collective memory, fuelled mainly by several oral traditions, have become the common heritage of all humankind, an inheritance bestowed equally and gratuitously on future generations. The tip of the inverted tower symbolises the beginning of this linguistic singularity – an initial linguistic Big Bang, after the Flood. The tower is slightly tilted, showing the imperfection which comes with anything human, including language. It is inherent in the human condition not to be perfect. Nothing is. There is an element of the old Japanese art of kintsugi in the colour scheme, but instead of using gold (which I was considering in fact) I used copper which gives that rusty, rugged look.

The Hemispherical Base

This hemisphere is straightforwardly, and quite obviously, representing the observable universe or alternatively and more tangibly, our planet. Depicted prudently on it are the ruins of our past civilisations: Babylonia, Mesopotamia, the Romans, the Greeks, etc.. What these peoples left us has given us that which we have now: religion, morality, politics, science, philosophy, art – from the ruins of the past to the future of humanity in peace in diversity and above all with multilingualism. Multilingualism, according to this view is not simply about language. It is about civilisation itself.

The Colours Used

The main idea I wanted to convey is that of metal: bronze and copper hues. This in order to add that millennial appearance.

The Four Figures

First of all, something has to be said about the significance of the four figures. Why not three or five? The four figures represent the four cardinal directions pointing towards the all-inclusiveness and the importance of all languages of the world. Many parts of the world were colonised and through this colonisation some languages were lost. Through this process of political or economic colonisation the development of a practical universal means of communication occurred. From Latin to English the efficiency of trade required the use of a *lingua franca*. This, perhaps, involuntarily reduced the need for languages to be spoken and translated and perhaps also involuntarily killed off some minor languages. The history of the world's languages is largely a story of loss and decline. At around 8000 BC, linguists estimate that upwards of 20000 languages may have been in existence. Today the number stands at 6909 and is declining rapidly.

The four figures are in different positions.



Artistic representation of the Tower of Babel

They are different yet they are all the same. They come from the same ancestors. They behave differently but have a common base. They drink (hence the straw like *proboscis*) from the same *corpus* of knowledge. They contribute what they can to the linguistic corpus of knowledge and take what they need from it. The babel of many languages has become the repository of knowledge and the soul of humanity. Their androgynous elongated delicate bodies are sensual and seductive, but at the same time they remind us of the fragility of the individual human being, nation, culture, religion, language. But together we're more complete and we are stronger! We are all part of **INVERSOBABEL!**

The Wednesday

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Nearing An End



In a fraction of a thought my journey was shattered.
Lorry-rammed then nothing else mattered.
Still I gripped the steering wheel as if still in control.
Helpless hurtling until a barrier bounce, and I was
Seat-belted, entwined in a final roll.

Afterwards they said, 20 seconds earlier
I would have skimmed the parapet and now be dead.
Was I glad to have survived, or close-shave terrified?
They called me a taxi to send me home.
As I left the scene, I heard my cd still playing:
I went down to St James' Infirmary.

David BurrIDGE