The *Wednesday*

Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

Editorial

Why Do We Do Philosophy?

The Philosophy Society at Rewley House, Oxford, organised a debate two weeks ago on the question of 'Why do we do philosophy?' The idea for this meeting was suggested by Chris Seddon who has just taken over as the organiser of the monthly Friday debate that has been running for nearly two decades. Peter Townsend retired from the task of organising the meetings after being in the chair for a long time. The Friday meeting was an idea that he started in the early years of the millennium. To suggest the topic for most weeks and to chase people for talks over the months and the years is a credit to him and I am personally very grateful.

May I take this opportunity to thank Peter for all that he did for philosophy in Oxford, including editing the journal of the Society. He has a great analytical mind with a common-sense attitude, and a love of ordinary language as a measure of philosophical thinking and talking that has influenced many and stimulated their energy for debate.

The number of people attending the meeting was not large but was representative. Listening to their experience of philosophy, how they started and how they see the discipline (or the way of life) was interesting. It turned out that we all have a common interest in wisdom but also we have different routes to it. For example, our visiting philosopher from Japan, Mao Naka, who is also a friend of the Wednesday group, said that she noticed that people don't consider matters in depth and she studied philosophy to give her the means to analyse concepts and arguments. She also prefers to analyse concrete experience and selected French phenomenology for her doctoral thesis. Kingsley Mickley, a biologist, said that he is interested in the common ground between philosophy and science.

What brought him to philosophy is the literature produced by philosophers on science and scientists on philosophy. He wants to make sense of both.

Chris Seddon studied philosophy for his first degree and came back to philosophy after a personal crisis. He thinks that rationalism is not enough, and he needs to join it with religion. Bob Stone, a retired classicist, said he came to philosophy through the study of Plato. David Clough said that he uses philosophy for analysis and not for life. For that, he looks to religion. His philosophical outlook is Platonist, although he was interested in Existentialism and the Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty. David Burridge said the test of a good belief, for him, is how that belief lifts your conduct beyond self-interest.

The two long-standing members of the Friday meetings, Jeanne Warren and Peter Townsend, added their comments. Jeanne said that she came to philosophy through a crisis of belief in her teens, but she didn't do philosophy until she was grown up. She was influenced, initially, by Existentialism, Sartre and Camus, but then she discovered the thought of Macmurray and dedicated the rest of her intellectual life to the study and promotion of his philosophy. Peter thinks many discussions and arguments can be resolved by a clear use of words.

Chris should be congratulated on organising this debate and on announcing the title of the next few debates for the coming months. It may be a good idea to put this debate as a question to the entire membership of the Philosophy Society and to study and report on their experiences and ideas. The *Wednesday* welcomes any contribution in this regard from this Society and the general readership.

The Editor

Rationalism

As a theory of human knowledge, rationalism stresses the role played by reason as opposed to the senses in understanding knowledge. Empiricism in contrast claims that all human knowledge ultimately derives from sensory experience. Rationalists consider the senses as an unreliable basis for gaining knowledge. They do concede however that sensory experience is necessary for the development of human knowledge, but it cannot be sufficient of itself. Rationalists maintain the possibility of a priori knowledge. This is knowledge possessed prior to experience. A proposition is a priori if its truth can be established independent of sensory observations. For the empiricists, a priori propositions are merely tautologies like 'all bachelors are unmarried'. Such propositions do not give any information about the world. In this article, which we publish in two parts, we shall examine some of the crucial views in the history of rationalism and empiricism.

RANJINI **GHOSH**

All major philosophical issues take their clues from Plato. It was Whitehead who said all Western philosophy is a footnote to Plato.

Plato

Plato believed that knowledge is to be distinguished from belief. Knowledge is linked to truth, but beliefs can be false. For him, knowledge is justified true belief. Not only is knowledge true belief supported by an explanation, but that knowledge is also infallible. Knowledge and belief have been classified as different 'powers' or 'faculties' and they have different objects. Knowledge relates to what *is* and belief relates to what 'is and is not'. In a way Plato seems to be saying that objects of knowledge have a privileged status over objects of belief. Plato also says that our conventional beliefs suffer from a crucial defect in that when we ascribe a property to a certain object, it may not have that property from a different point of view. Therefore, objects of belief do not possess properties in an absolute manner. The question then arises is whether objects of belief, like saying something to be beautiful or just, can unqualifiedly be so?

Plato says that it is possible that there can be true objects of knowledge that are unchanging and absolute. This is his famous doctrine of Forms. Every class of objects has an absolute and essential Form. A particular object may be beautiful, but the idea of beauty is unchanging and eternal. This concept of Forms is abstract

2

Descartes

Spinoza

and cannot be perceived by the senses. It can be grasped only intellectually. Plato insisted that in order to have true knowledge of the Forms or Ideas we have to move away from our world of mere sensory perceptions to the world of 'intelligibles'. So, we have a sensible world, a world revealed by our senses and a world revealed by our intellect. Through the simile of the sun Plato contrasts the visible world with the world of the Forms. Just like the sun makes visible the objects of our senses, the Form of the Good, which is the supreme Form, makes us aware of the world of true knowledge.

The simile of the divided line, that Plato gives in the Republic, explains the relationship between an object and its shadow as analogous to the relation between objects of intellect and objects of ordinary belief. The simile of the cave says that ordinary people are not able to grasp true knowledge and they only consider shadows as reality inside the cave. In order to move from belief to true knowledge we have to move away from ordinary sense perception to pure understanding.

Plato believed that the mind has to move away from the senses towards *a priori* reasoning and true knowledge can only be gained from mathematical reasoning. True knowledge cannot be gained from experience. Knowledge of the Forms can only be gained by abstract reasoning *a priori*. Such reasoning was without any aid from the senses. Plato said that the source of our knowledge of ultimate reality is within us. Our capacity for

grasping ultimate truths is innate in our mind. He explains the concept of 'recollection' where all learning is seen as a recollection from an earlier life of the soul. In his book *Meno* an example is given of a young slave boy who could explain a mathematical idea without having any formal education. This was because of innate ideas.
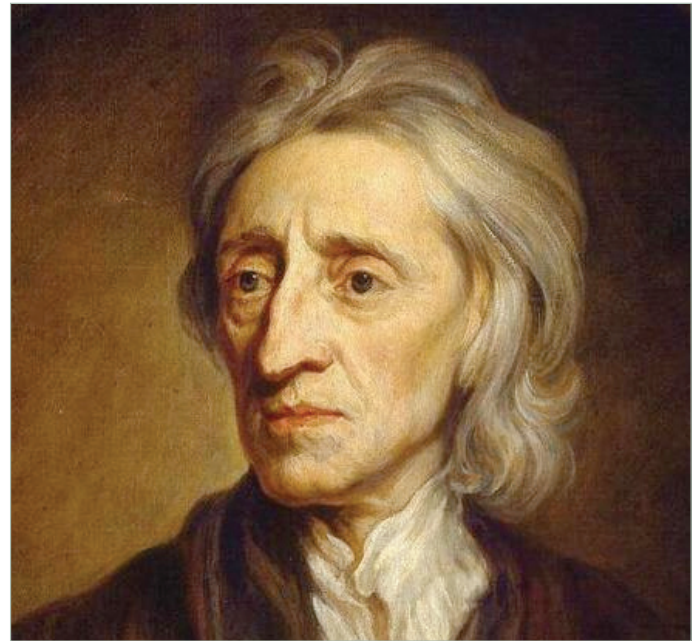
Descartes

Descartes is said to be the founder of the modern principle of rationalism. He argued that right from childhood he had been struck by a large number of falsehoods that he had accepted as true. His whole edifice of knowledge, he believed, was of doubtful nature. He realized that it was necessary for him to demolish everything and start right from the foundation.

He argued that a philosopher should rid himself of doubt through a systematic method of questioning. His method of doubt comes from three sources. He believes he cannot trust his senses which deceive him; he believes he may be dreaming; and there may be a demon deceiving him into believing. But he believes there is one truth that he cannot doubt, and which is that he thinks and therefore he exists. If the demon is deceiving him then he certainly exists. This then is the starting point of his philosophy which is that the individual is aware of his own existence. He also reasons that there is an idea of God in his mind and this idea has been placed in his mind by God himself. God is all-powerful and benevolent and cannot deceive

3

Leibnitz

Locke

him. Descartes also believes like Plato that senses can deceive us and that in order to have true knowledge we must move away from our senses to reason. In order to understand the essence of substances we have to rely on our intellect and not the senses. Our senses cannot grasp the essence of any substance. We can arrive at truth through 'clear and distinct ideas.'

Descartes starts from the knowledge of his own existence and arrives at the knowledge of the non-deceiving God. But the problem in the Cartesian system is how can we be sure that God exists in the first place and therefore the validation of all our beliefs by God becomes problematic. Until we know that God exists how can we rely on our mind? We cannot prove God exists without relying on our perceptions. This is the problem of the 'Cartesian circle'. But Descartes has a way out of this problem. There are certain propositions which are self-guaranteeing and do not require validation from God. '$2 + 2 = 4$' and 'I think, I exist' are such propositions. Their truth can never be mistaken.

Spinoza

The most fundamental notion in Spinoza's metaphysics is that of *substance*. The concept of substance comes from Aristotle. A substance is one that can be predicated of. For Descartes there were two kinds of substance, mind and matter. Spinoza maintained that there is necessarily only one substance which is in itself and conceived through itself. The entire universe is a manifestation of a single reality. This reality has an infinite number of attributes, but we can conceive only the modes of extension or the physical mode and modes of thought. For Spinoza, God is Nature.

Spinoza had a conception of truth which is based on 'adequate idea.' Such an idea has a necessary connection with the system as a whole. He did not believe in the correspondence theory of truth. His was a coherence theory of truth. Such a theory asserted that each part of Nature agrees with the whole. He gives the example of a worm living in blood which is able to distinguish by sight the particles of the blood, lymph etc. We live as parts of the universe like the worm lives in the blood. In order to explain the behavior of parts we have to understand the whole system first.

Spinoza's belief in holism is also evident in his conception of the mind and the body. For Descartes the mind is *res cogitans*, thinking substance. And matter is *res extensa*, extended in space. Mind and body are fundamentally opposed to each other. Spinoza while accepting Descartes' rationalism rejected his dualism. To him the mind and the body are one and the same thing. They are only different attributes of the same substance.

4

Kant

Hegel

Spinoza also had a crucial concept of *necessitariansim.* He believed that from a given definite cause an effect necessarily follows. He denied that the universe contained any non-necessary or contingent events. He believed that all things to exist and operate in a particular manner governed by divine nature. This logically follows from his monistic theory of substance. But in spite of his determinism he did allow an individual principle of striving or *conatus.* Individuals have a measure of freedom in expressing their own natures and resisting external forces.

Leibniz

Leibniz in his account of the universe subscribed to the Aristotelian view of the plurality of substances. His discussion of substances and attributes also dwells upon the nature of propositions. He divided propositions into 'truths of reason' and 'truths of fact'. Truths of reason are necessary and that the opposite is impossible, and truths of fact are contingent so that the opposite is possible. Leibniz claimed that our reasoning is based on two great principles: the Principle of Contradiction and the Principle of Sufficient Reason. The Principle of Contradiction states that a proposition is true if its opposite implies a contradiction. If we call something a triangle but deny that it is three sided, then it will lead to a contradiction. All true propositions have the property that the predicate is contained in the subject.

Leibniz's conception of substance is connected with his doctrine of the monad. Every individual substance has inside it everything that it has ever done or will do. In his theory of Pre-Established Harmony, he said that God while creating the universe directed that all monads should work together to form a perfect whole. In his Principle of Sufficient Reason, he asserts that no fact can exist or be true without a sufficient reason. Everything that happens in the world happens because of the Supreme Monad. There is a possibility of an infinity of universes but only one exists and so God must have had sufficient reason to create this world. This world which God has chosen is the best of all worlds and the most perfect.

Empiricist Counter - Revolution

The empiricists have attacked the rationalist edifice of a priori knowledge and innate ideas of the mind. The main articulators of this view have been Locke and Hume. John Locke argued that our knowledge is not derived from innate ideas but acquired through experience. The mind at birth is a *tabula rasa*. It is experience which imprints itself on the mind. All knowledge is ultimately derived from experience and experience consists in *sensation*. In addition to the ideas of sensation we have the ideas of reflection. David Hume also

5

agreed with Locke that all our ideas are derived from experience. He believed that the mind has impressions and ideas derived from sensory experience. Hume categorized human reason as relations of ideas and matters of fact. Relations of ideas are arithmetical propositions and are tautologies. Such tautologies do not provide any information about actual reality. Matters of fact relate to the actual world. Knowledge of matters of fact cannot be had by a priori reasoning but only through experience. In his examination of the concept of causality, Hume said that there are three elements which form part of a causal relationship and they are *priority*, *contiguity* and *necessary connection*. The idea of necessity is not derived from either logic or observation. It only derives from mere repetition or regularity of events. We only observe a series of constant conjunctions.

Kantian Synthesis

The empiricist position of Hume was that all a priori truths are analytic and all *a posteriori* truths are synthetic. Kant claimed that there could be synthetic a priori judgements. The most important example of this is the law of causation. It is not an analytic proposition because the concept of change does not logically imply the idea of something which is caused. But it is a universally and necessarily true proposition that can be proved by human reason.

Kant argued that our only possible objects of knowledge are the *phenomena*. We cannot have knowledge of the ultimate world or the *noumena*. It was not possible to go beyond our sensory limitations to have knowledge of reality. Kant was also critical of the empiricist viewpoint that sense impressions alone are the basis of knowledge. Kant does not believe that the mind is a passive receiver of sense impressions. On the contrary, the mind is actively involved in processing the perceptions received into concepts of understanding. If we are able to experience the world at all then it has to be through these concepts and categories. Sense data are important because without such content thoughts would be empty. But concepts are also important for gaining a higher knowledge of reality. The categories of space, time and causality are fundamental in having an experience of reality.

The most crucial observation of Kant is that the categories are *pre-supposed* by experience. They are necessary pre-conditions before we can have any experience of the world. All experience of the world has to conform to these categories. It is we who impose the structure of understanding on the world.

Hegel

Hegel saw all history as the development of the mind or reason. His analysis is based on the principle of the dialectic. The concept of the dialectic comes from the dialogues of Socrates which progressed by a method of argument and counter-argument. Plato considered it to be the highest form of philosophical reasoning where the mind moves upwards to first principles through the process of argument and counter-argument.

Hegel used this Platonic conception to develop his categories of the dialectic which are now known as *thesis*, *antithesis* and *synthesis*. Fichte was the first to use them. The Hegelian synthesis cancels out whatever is irrational in both the *thesis* and *antithesis* and preserves what is rational and true and this is incorporated into a higher truth.

He says that human beings have an ordinary awareness of things which he calls 'sensible certainty.' These are like the ideas or impressions on the mind as described by Locke and Hume. The question is how such ordinary awareness can allow us to have a higher knowledge. According to Hegel it was possible only if we are able to move from particular sensory experiences to more universal concepts. It is only through universal properties that we can have true knowledge. It is only through self-consciousness that we can move to the level of synthesis. The contradictions in our ordinary sensible awareness are removed and the valuable elements are preserved and integrated into a higher form of knowledge.

It was from Plato that Hegel took the idea of the dialectic and from Spinoza he took the holistic conception of knowledge. We need to integrate particular experiences into universal knowledge.

6

Poetry

Whose Verse is that Poem?

CHRIS **NORRIS**

(Supposed Anglo-Welshism, as in
'whose coat is this jacket?'
or 'whose boots are these shoes?')

Whose roundelay is that Horatian Ode?
What sort of English rhymester's that Welsh bard?
Whose comic verse is this in tragic mode?
Who's backward-looking in the avant-garde?

What kind of villanelle's that Shakespeare sonnet?
Who gave blank verse that novel rhyming twist?
Which free-verse freak based fixed-form stanzas on it?
Which giddy rhapsode's turned strict prosodist?

Whose elegy's that satire, whose that strain
Of solemn mock-heroic, whose grave tone
So flighty and light-hearted, whose that vein
Of pathos that each jester makes his own?

Whose novel's that short story, whose haiku
That Odyssey, whose epic that great feat
Of verse concision, and whose clerihew
The weighty form that had great Homer beat?

Whose vital words are these that waste your time?
Whose poem's this Welsh-baiting bunch of crap?
Whose free-verse lines are these that scan and rhyme?
And finally: whose hat's this dunce's cap?

7
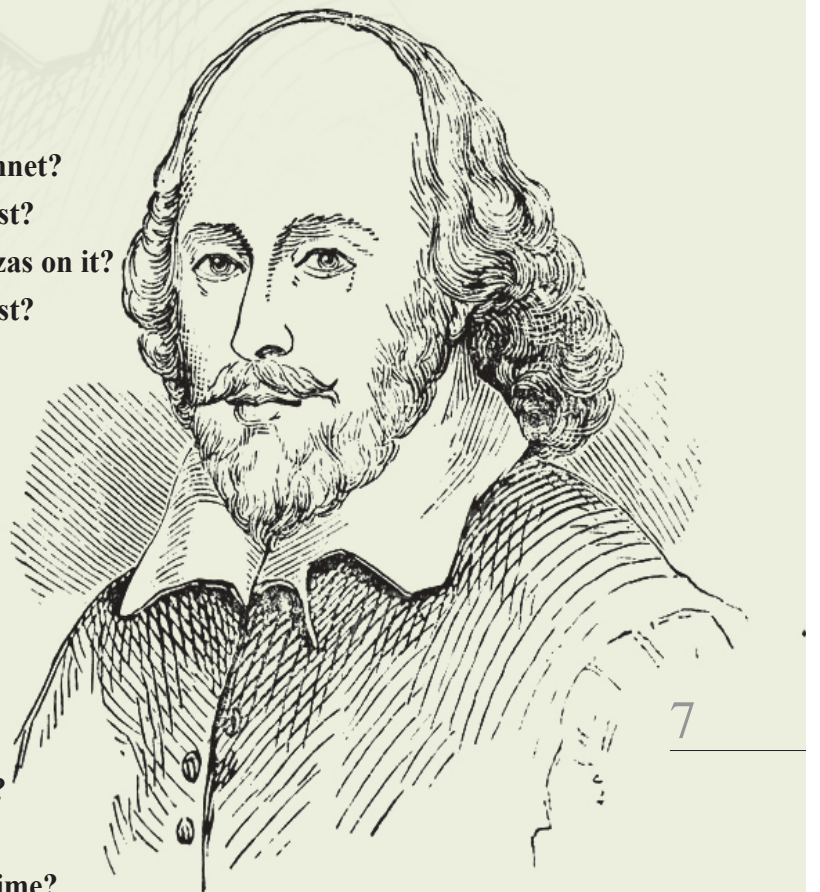
When a Tree Falls

When a tree falls in the forest,
shall a sound be heard at all?
Will a lament rise up skywards,
penetrate its earthen soul?

Will roots listen into silence
stretching deep into the dark
to maintain and to uphold
all its former untold glory,

love affairs with wind and rain,
trace the sunshine in life's story,
venerate and hold again?

When a tree falls in the forest
Will we hear its silent voice?
Will we think about a lifetime
in a service without choice?

Does its dying foliage crumble
in an effort to remind
of the day we too are falling,
suddenly and undefined,

8

and that memories shall wane

from so many untold stories

buried deep, where they remain?

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Plato's Republic:
An Enquiry Into The Nature Of Morality

This article is based on the translation by Robin Waterfield (Oxford World Classics). I am aware that other translators have used the word Justice instead of morality. In the chapter: The Challenge to Socrates, the last para starts: 'So since it is your expressed opinion that morality is one of those paramount good things...' In Grube's translation, for example, it reads: 'You agree that justice is one of the greatest goods...'. In the following I will use the word Morality to accord with the translation I am relying on.

DAVID **BURRIDGE**
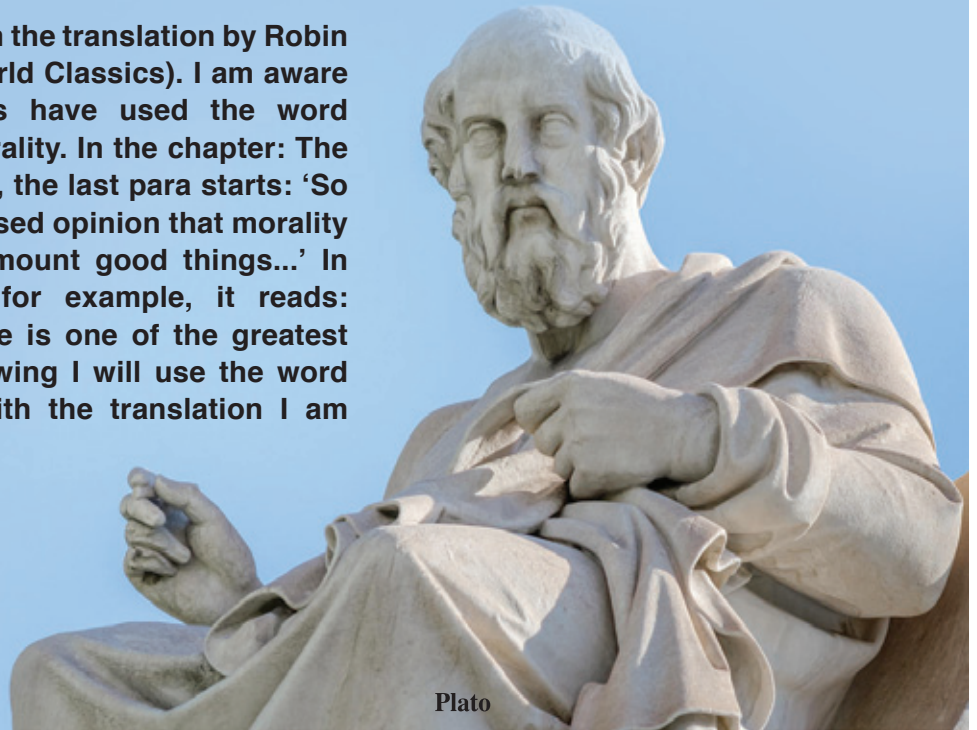
Plato

It is tempting when reading Plato's *Republic* to see it only as a description of an ideal republic based on thinking in Plato's times. But many commentators warn that this is only a metaphor. For any metaphor to succeed it needs to rely on a cogent hard example to which all abstract things are compared. Taking this theme forward I want to highlight in the following the theme of morality and how it appears that Plato wants us to understand it. I will describe this as best I can and then critique the description.

Plato kicks off the treatise with what seems to be a *soapy* discussion between Socrates (his usual protagonist) and some young men who are excited about the games they are about to witness. This leads to reflection on age, declining interest in physical pleasures and the enjoyment of conversation. (327a -329a book I)

Is old age easier to bear because the pressures of sex have gone or because one has sufficient money? So the question of whether riches can make any difference as to whether a man is good or bad is discussed. Then there are thoughts of death and reviewing one's life and the people we may have wronged. A definition of morality: to tell the truth and to give back whatever one has borrowed is left on the table. Clearly Socrates wants to lift this discussion. In his debate with Thrasymachus, Socrates lays down the idea that morality is a function to perform; '*Therefore management and authority will inevitably be handled badly by a bad mind, whereas a good mind does everything well*'... '*Now, we are agreed that morality is a good mental state and that immorality is a bad mental state.*' (353e-354b book I)

This is only the kicking-off point for the discussion between Socrates and Glaucon and Adeimantus which features throughout the whole of the book. In Book II, they explore a devil's advocate argument, looking at doing bad, in terms of the disadvantages and the benefits potentially reaped. This is a kind of utilitarian approach which leads to laws and decrees which guarantee between individuals that no wrong will be committed or received. So, reluctant doers might be essentially good or bad. A colossal criminal might find it in his best interests to appear to do good. Equally a moral person would need to be stripped of his moral aura and tested through his whole life to discover his morality. Of course, the self-interest argument is carried through to the avoidance of Hades.

Socrates directs them to the conclusion that morality is worth having not just for the consequences, but it is good in itself, whether or not it is hidden from gods and men. It is to explore this further that Plato begins to imagine the constitution of an ideal community. He begins with what might be describes as a community based on *Homo Economicus.* Farmers bringing their produce to market and trading. Traders in the market place with a single job of exchanging goods for money – a community of merchants. People doing their job living within their means – reclining on couches and eating from tables. Then the next question is - where is morality in all of this and is there more to the human psyche than meeting needs?

As the community expands the needs become more complex – bloated and distended with occupations which leave the essential requirements of a community behind (uncontrolled capitalism?). This in turn leads to disputes over land etc., which triggers off wars. This brings in the need for *a Guardian,* who is seen first as a military person, but then it is proposed that he should have a philosopher's love of knowledge; '*he will have a philosopher's love of knowledge and will be passionate, quick on his feet and strong.*' He must not only have

these aptitudes, he also needs to be educated. (368a -376a)

Plato defines the elements of his community: Guardians and their auxiliaries who are courageous and wise and the lower orders who are self-disciplined and obedient. Happiness seems to consist of everyone specialising in doing his duty, distinct from everyone else. '*Now we decided that a community was moral when each of the three natural classes that exist within it did its own job---*' But then Socrates challenges with the idea that all three states can exist in a single individual's mind, introducing the concept of conflict to the discussion. The conflict that might arise between the three different parts of the mind: the rational and the desirous; the passions. These are analogous to the elements in the community, so the inner states are being described by the description of the community.

The Guardians' qualities are key to the leadership of the community, and to continue the metaphor, to the higher order of the mind. They should have a natural aptitude but also be educated for their job. '*But how are we going to bring these people up?*' (376d) – It is decided that they need to have physical prowess and love of knowledge as '*the more courageous and intelligent a mind is, the less likely that an external agent would disturb and alter it.*' The emphasis will be on the development of an elite, rather than learning from interaction, with say ordinary people. Truth for Plato lies outside the empirical and it is with God: '*Well would god willingly mask the truth behind appearance and deceive us by his words or actions?*' (382a). '*God gave us two corresponding areas of expertise – culture and physical exercise.— it's the person who makes the best blend of physical exercise and culture and who applies them to the mind in the right proportions ,whom we should really describe as a virtuoso…*' and '*we'll always need someone of this type to oversee our community…*' (412a).

Plato, on the one hand, sees everyone belonging to a community, but already made different in

11

their competences by God: '*Although all of you citizens are brothers nevertheless during the kneading phase, God included Gold in the mixture when he was forming those of you who have what it takes to be rulers – silver when he was forming auxiliaries, and iron and copper when he was forming the farmers and other workers.*' (415a-b). In fairness he accepted that a child of a lead-worker could be tinged with silver.

Goodness in the community is defined by four virtues: wisdom, courage, self-discipline, justice and piety. In the case of wisdom it is agreed that it may be found in any part of the community, but the overriding wisdom by the smallest group – the guardians. (428a -429a). Courage is defined as '*the ability to retain under all circumstances the notion that things and the kind of things to be feared are precisely those things and kind of things which during their education the legislator pronounced fearful.*' (429e). He depicts it as a retention of values learnt rather than reflecting any natural bravery.

Self-discipline or self-mastery is essentially controlling one's pleasure and desires to play one's defined role in society: ''*self–discipline resembles a kind of attunement*' (432a).

Taking all of these definitions together morality is defined as contributing towards the community's goodness – '*doing one's own job and not intruding elsewhere*' (433 a-e) or '*keeping one's own property and keeping to one's own occupation.*'

The moral person resembles the moral community in that he is self-disciplined, courageous and wise taking into account the above-mentioned definitions. Morality is the harmony between the parts of a person's mind under the leadership of his intellect: '*In the course of- an - activity it is conduct which preserves and promotes this inner conduct of his that he regards as moral and describes as fine, and it is the knowledge which oversees this conduct that he regards as wisdom, however it is any conduct which disperses this condition which he regards as immoral*' (443d).

The complex allegory of the cave

He sees lust and avarice as conditions that effect the health of the moral mind: '*Healthy factors engender health and unhealthy one's illness --- Well doesn't moral behaviour engender morality, while immoral behaviour engenders immorality?*' Disease is created by subverting the natural order (444d).

To understand morality fully it is proposed that something more fundamental has to be understood; that of goodness. Because this is where everything that is moral gets its value. (504-505): '*Now -----the usual view of goodness that it is pleasure and a more ingenious view that it is knowledge.*' (505b). He then uses the sun as a metaphor. We have the ability to see, but in order to see we need the light of the sun. *'Well here's how you can think about the mind as well. When its object is something which is lit up by truth and reality then it has ---intelligent awareness and knowledge.'*

The complex allegory of the cave appears to be saying at the outset that the ability of people to see or understand the shape of artefacts relates to whether they have been exposed to shadows or sunlight: '*...imagine that one of them has been set free and is suddenly made to stand up ---and look towards the firelight----he's too dazzled --- to be capable of making out the objects whose shadows he had been formerly looking at*' (515d). Morality would seem here not to be something from God, but something determined by our environment. But his conclusions go further. Uneducated people, who have no experience of truth would make incompetent administrators - the same goes for people who are allowed to spend their whole lives educating themselves – they would be no good.

The best leaders that have the ability to see the light and are trained to go into the shadows and learn to look at things in the dark, will be able to work in both spheres: '*Morality and goodness will enable you to identify any one of the images and recognise what it is an image of*' (520b). The guardians remain a separate class but can be trained to understand the workers.
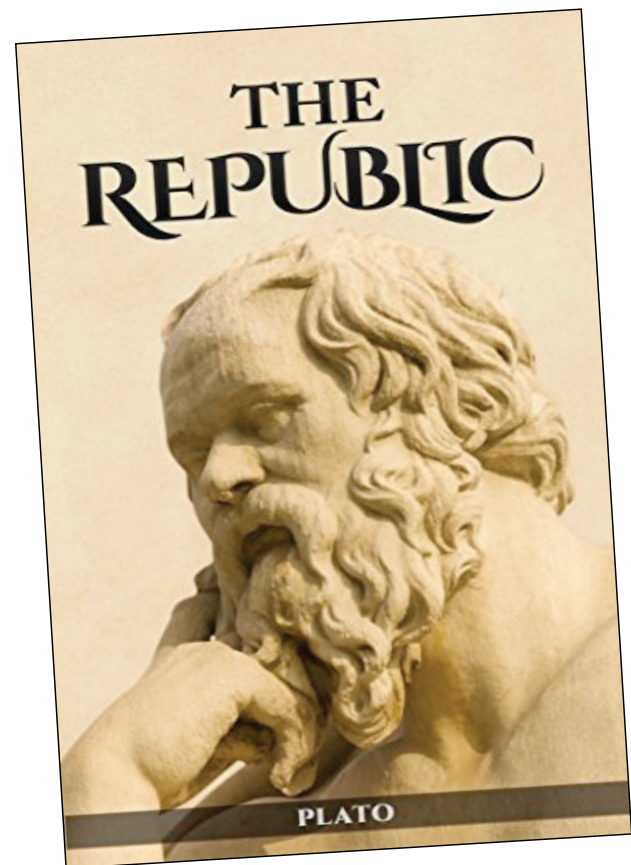
THE REPUBLIC

PLATO

I began this essay accepting that Plato's *Republic* is a metaphor rather than a simple description of an ideal republic. But a metaphor only really works if the concrete example is sound. I would argue that separating the different elements of Plato's society in the deep way he describes does not create freedom but rather a moral apartheid. Nobody can learn to rule unless he engages in the day to day problems of the people, not as a high minded outsider (whatever university he attended), but as someone who leads from within. An integrated society, which has substantial social mobility, was probably not feasible in Plato's time, but it is where we should be heading now. By the same token the divisions in our heads need to be reconciled. The primordial 'I' is not a wild dog to be held tight on a lead by the superego. Morality needs to be empirically tested, its soundness subject to review. A person with a healthy moral outlook is someone who has explored the effect of good and bad decisions and who makes a reasoned and caring choice.

13

What Has Happened to Critique?

Notes of Meeting Held on Wednesday 9ᵗʰ January 2019

PAUL **COCKBURN**

We discussed the philosophical method of 'critique'. Bruno Latour strongly criticized the objectivity of scientists from a sociological point of view, following on from Thomas Kuhn's work in the 1960s. Latour thought that social criticism generally had two approaches: the 'fact' position and the 'fairy' position. The fairy position says that most beliefs such as religion are concepts created by the projected wishes and desires of the naïve believer.

The fact position argues that individuals are dominated without being aware of it by external forces such as economics, class or gender. Guy Debord thought that 'reality' (whatever that is), is being replaced by distorted images. However, in 2004 Latour asked, 'Why has critique run out of steam?' Social critique had gone too far. The critic should not be so iconoclastic. We need a positive framing of critique. It is easy to knock structures down, but we need to address 'matters of concern' rather than undermining them.

There are many critical discourses: Marxism, psycho-analysis, feminism, power structures, sociology, medicine etc. All of these impact on the individual, but they all seem to be orthogonal to one another. They often have specialist departments in universities, and they usually plough their own furrows, although inter-disciplinary work does occur. One view expressed was that all these 'life' discourses have to be contained in the individual at a personal level. This involves psychological balance. Over time, we have to avoid being submerged and overwhelmed by one factor at the expense of others. A war analogy might be helpful – you might win a battle on the ground with troops but be defeated by air or sea power.

Wittgenstein

Language and Use

Earlier in the last century, Ludwig Wittgenstein put limits on our knowledge in terms of language. His propositional logic assumed that language could be precise, and statements were either true or false in an objective sense. However, by the end of his career he recognized the social use of language in many aspects of our communal life.

In a poem however, it seems that there are many layers of meaning, the language opens creatively so that we can see many dimensions. The use of metaphor and other poetic devices allows for subtle meanings, which can be vague and ambiguous. This is very different from science, which in its experimental method often wants to close things down to study a limited set of factors. But scientists also need to be creative!

Religion and Nonsense

Notes of Meeting Held on Wednesday 16ᵗʰ January

Carolyn Wilde reported on the two-day conference on 'Religion as Nonsense' which recently took place. This was based on Wittgenstein's work.

In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, his early major work, Wittgenstein thought only propositional sentences that mirror matters of fact which can be verified empirically make 'true' sense. Religious language cannot be verified and so is 'nonsense'. However, in his later philosophy, he looks at the social usage of language, and in the *Lectures on Ethics* he implies that matters of commitment and value are not propositions but are to do with the way we live our lives.

In the *Philosophical Investigations*, his later work, he starts by looking at the simple naming function of language, for example 'this is a glass'. But can we name pain, a feeling, in the same way? We see a state, a behavior, and we agree that correlates with someone being in pain. We can apply general rules, we have a shared understanding, but we might need to look at the context of a situation carefully. And even when the context seems obvious, there is perhaps a question we need to ask: why is someone in pain? Could they be faking it?

The meeting also discussed the state of philosophy in Japan with our visiting philosopher Mao Naka. We will publish the details in future issues of The *Wednesday*.
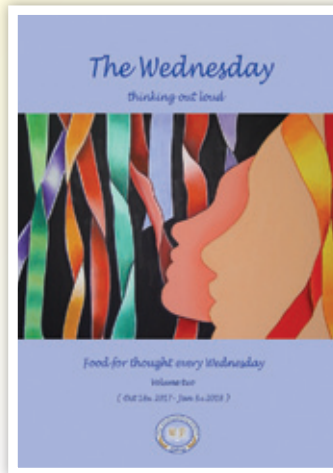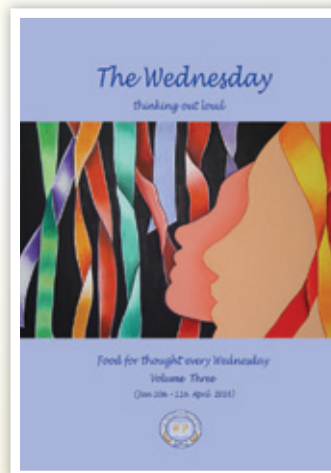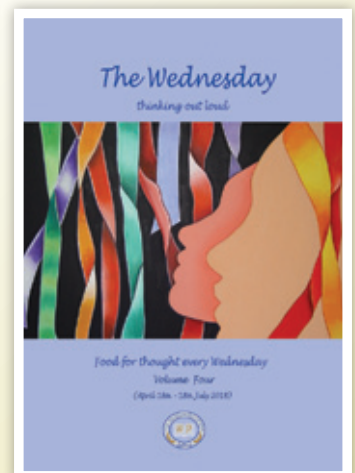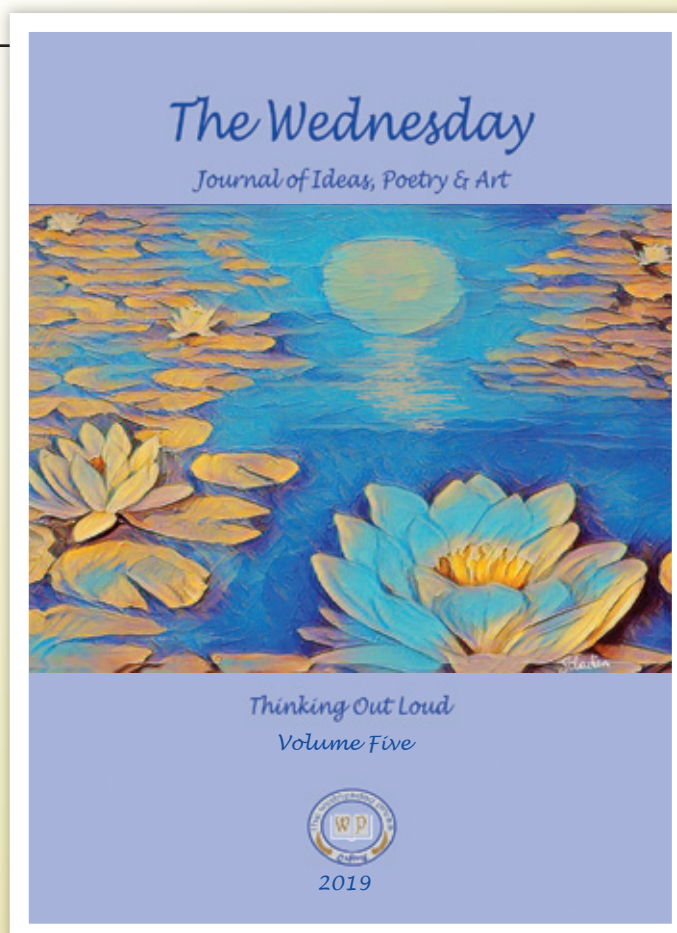
The *Wednesday*

The Second Year
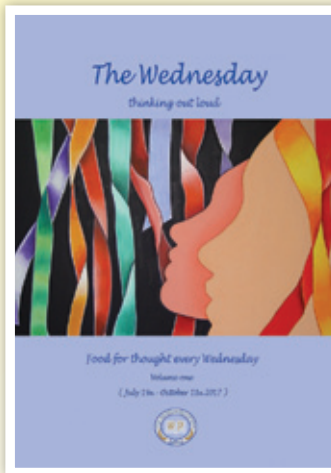
BOOK ONE   BOOK TWO   BOOK THREE   BOOK FOUR

BOOK FIVE

is now out