

The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

Editorial

Progress in Philosophy

I have been thinking for a while about the state of current philosophy. This is a general question but one aspect that interests me is the confidence of the analytical school of philosophy in its methods, achievements, its anti-metaphysical approach and the reaction it has generated. The analytical philosophers say that they have made real philosophical progress, but some would question this claim.

John Haldane in his paper 'Has Philosophy Made a Difference and Could it be Expected To?' (Published in *Philosophy at the new Millennium*, ed. A. O'Hear) argues that analytical philosophy has achieved a high degree of methodological and technical sophistication but that should not give it the impression or the right to say that it has got rid of the old philosophical questions. What he seems to object to is the narrow conception of philosophy; a conception that takes its ideal from the clarity of science. It has confused the work of philosophy with that of science. Haldane thinks that 'philosophy arises out of a number of different kinds of interest which are often deeply submerged but which show themselves from time to time in responses to such issues as the nature of philosophical knowledge and its place in relation to other forms of understanding.'

But there is also the relevance of such philosophy to the wider issues of human life, or as Haldane puts it: 'philosophy's impact *beyond* philosophy.' He distinguishes between philosophy as a midwife to science and philosophy as a counsel to agents. Despite philosophy's cooperation with science, it has not eliminated metaphysical questions, such as the mind/body problem, but has made them clearer. And in its second role as guide to conduct, meaning and values, it still has more work to do, especially in the expanding field of applied ethics.

It is also the case that philosophy may not progress in a linear way but progresses through a spiral movement

upward and 'returning periodically not to exactly the same position but to ones in alignment with them at successively higher levels.' But whatever movement it takes, philosophy should not lose sight of meaning, and it should be relevant to life.

Haldane reviews a classification of philosophical trends by Antony Kenny. Kenny opposes analytical philosophy to other trends: Marxism, Existentialism and Scholasticism and adds that the divisions start to crumble in the sixties, creating a less ideological and more diverse philosophical scene. Haldane makes his own classification, in a more inclusive way. He takes different branches within analytical philosophy and opposes the philosophy of science to that of art, politics and religion, to emphasise the diversity of discourse and concerns in contemporary philosophy. What seems of utmost importance to one variant is not so for another. Philosophy of science may insist on the value of the latest discoveries, on methodological rigour, but these may not be important for art, politics or religion. The latter group of philosophies are more interested in human existence, wisdom and the meaning of life than the philosophers of science.

Haldane concludes that:

'It is to be expected that in various times and places one or more of these conceptions may dominate to near exclusion of others but no final victory can be expected since each answers to something too deep to be uprooted or eradicated.'

The lesson of these reflections is that there are diverse points of view as to the nature of philosophy and it is a mistake to narrow the field to a certain discourse or assumption. Real progress is strongly linked to maintaining such a diversity.

The Editor

Repetition in Hegel and Kierkegaard

Systematic idealist philosophy following Kant aimed to describe all reality in terms of a fundamental originary act and then attempted to explain the multiplicity of the world in terms of that act. It had to resolve the contradictions between self and world, self and other selves and the spheres of determinate knowledge and free action in terms of that act. Fichte and Schelling began with the positing by the I of itself as object, and Hegel with the fundamental category of Being. Each were required in different ways to posit a resistance to the initial act and its compensating reiteration in repeated and modified forms. They were therefore required to utilise the notion of Repetition either explicitly or implicitly. In this essay I want to outline how repetition is implicitly used in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), before describing how the concept is foregrounded explicitly by Kierkegaard and undergoes a change in its meaning and significance.

DAVID SOLOMON

Part 1

2 In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Reason is the process by which Consciousness goes through the stages of its own evolution and learns what it itself is and what absolute truth is. What Hegel calls Spirit is the point at which the individual consciousness by following the various forms of its evolution overcomes its separation from the world and from other consciousnesses. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a retrospective account of how consciousness finds a home in the world, by successive attempts to synthesise reality as it presents itself into an absolute whole. Consciousness gradually learns what it is and learns what the world is, and overcomes the gap between them. By going through different stages it develops in the end a complete understanding of itself and a more complete understanding of the world, and what it is to overcome its separation from it. In this way, it achieves certainty for itself and its place

in the world. Each 'shape' of consciousness is a temporary stage, which gives it a particular limited understanding of itself and the world. In Hegel's account there is an increasing step by step awareness by consciousness of its own part in the process of the dialectic, that is the process of evolution itself. Each particular stage involves a to-and-fro movement between its own awareness of itself and the objects in the world corresponding to it. In the course of this movement, consciousness comes to be aware of the world as something to be appropriated to itself.

Each achievement by consciousness of a new shape also involves awareness of a contradiction, which shows up the shape to be incomplete. The contradiction points the way to the next shape. Initially for example the unsuccessful attempt to feel at home in the world through immediate



Hegel

awareness of objects leads to the development of self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is then confronted by a world of objects that appear alien and hostile to it and that it attempts to master initially by consuming and destroying in order to establish its sole hegemony. The unsatisfactory nature of this attempt to consume the objects of the world leads to an encounter with another self-consciousness, and a struggle for recognition between them. The winner in this struggle becomes the Master, the loser the Slave. Paradoxically it is the slave that comes to have the advantage because it is he / she that realises the distinction between the world and self-consciousness, and recognises that the world consists of things to be worked on (albeit on behalf of the Master). In doing this the slave learns that it is possible to shape things in the world as an expression of his being rather than trying to eliminate them. Through this develops the idea of creation and work. Through various further stages of the Stoical and Sceptical consciousness, the Unhappy Consciousness, Rationalism, Observing Reason, and different manifestations of Art and Culture, and Religion,



Kierkegaard

consciousness realises the process it has had to go through and the content of the process itself by which it comes to embrace everything completely, that is all truth about the world together with the realisation of the stages of its own evolution. It achieves a harmony between its own certainty and the world as it is. This is the Absolute which combines truth with certainty. The sundering between self and the world and the divide between one human being and another are overcome. On the way to the Absolute, the process repeats itself, with consciousness each time achieving greater and greater insight into its own nature and development.

What will later come to be for consciousness will be the experience of what spirit is, that is, this absolute substance which constitutes the unity of its oppositions in their complete freedom and self-sufficiency, namely, in the oppositions of the various self-consciousnesses existing for themselves: The I that is we and the we that is I. As the concept of spirit, consciousness first reaches its turning point in self-consciousness, where

it leaves behind the colourful semblance of the sensuous world and the empty night of the supersensible other-worldly beyond and steps into the spiritual daylight of the present. (*Hegel Phenomenology* §177)

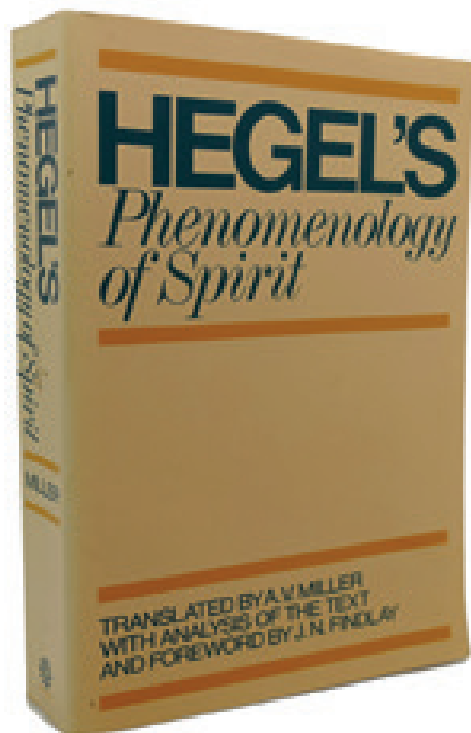
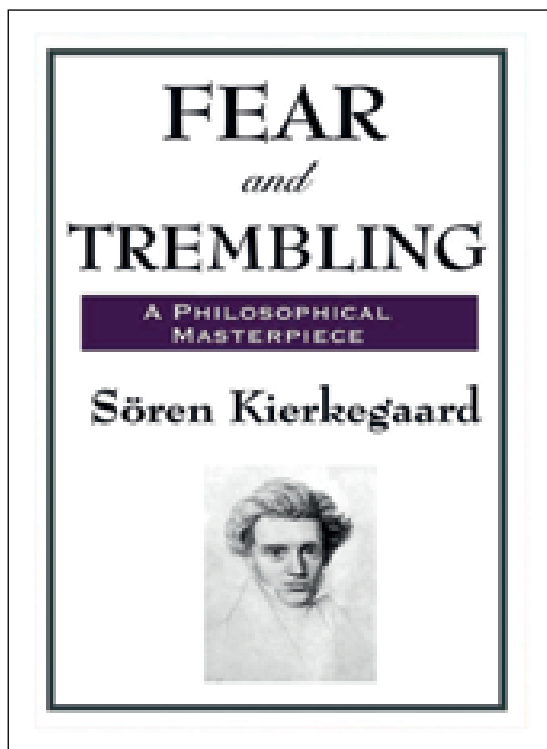
Hegel makes a distinction between our perspective as philosophers / observers of the process and consciousness at each stage of the process, between what he calls the In-itself and the For-itself. Consciousness at each particular stage of its formation does not have a realisation or a full realisation of the process by which it came to be. It experiences its world as emerging for it. We on the other hand, because we ourselves have been through all the stages of its evolution, know the processes that were necessary for it to achieve the next stage.

Since what at first appeared as the object for consciousness descends into a knowledge of the object, and the in-itself becomes a being-for-consciousness of the in-itself, this latter is the new object. As a result, a new shape of consciousness also emerges for which the essence is something different from what was the essence for the preceding shape. It is this circumstance which guides the whole succession of the shapes of consciousness in their necessity. However, it is just this necessity itself, that is, the emergence of the new object, which presents itself to consciousness without consciousness knowing how that happens to it; it takes place for us, as it were, behind the back of consciousness. A moment of the in-itself, that is, of being for us, thereby enters into its movement which does not exhibit itself for the consciousness which is comprehended in experience itself. However, the content of what emerges in our eyes exists for consciousness, and we comprehend only what is formal in it, that is, its pure emergence. For consciousness, what has emerged exists merely as the object, whereas for us, what has emerged exists at the same

time as a movement and a coming-to-be. (*Phenomenology* §87)

In the *Phenomenology* the process of consciousness, contradiction and resolution in another shape of consciousness repeats itself at each stage. This is the Repetition of the dialectic – the process – itself. Repetition is analogous to the way a spiral road ascends a mountain by circling round it at successively higher and higher levels. Each time a form of consciousness reaches an apparent impasse a new shape ‘emerges’. The limitations of the existing form are implicit in it, as is the requirement or necessity that it transcends itself. The new stage or shape is a solution to the impasse and is hence the result of the contradiction presented by the previous one. The new stage overcomes and at the same time preserves the factors making up the old one, although consciousness at that particular stage may not be aware of this. At different stages, consciousness goes through frustration, struggle, unhappiness, and unfulfilment but there is an underlying guarantee provided by the dialectical process itself. There is despair and loneliness, the alienation of one consciousness or group from another, as in the opposition of Master and Slave. There is however an assurance for us that the dialectic is working towards the Absolute. The fact that the process as told in the *Phenomenology* is told retrospectively means that we (as readers, or philosophers, that is those of us who have already gone through all the stages and therefore can understand what they really signify) means that all the unhappiness and alienation is justified in the end, that is from the point of view that we ourselves have reached.

For Kierkegaard by contrast, ‘Repetition’ is a category that does not contain any implicit guarantee. His tragi-comic novel of the same name, written in 1843, deals with the situation of its hero, a young man whose hyper-reflective nature excludes him from the universal in the form of being able to fulfil his love for the woman



who has accepted his proposal of marriage. The young man cannot instead help experiencing his lover as the embodiment of a poetic idea instead of an actual existing person. He is afraid that he will ruin her life if he marries her under false pretences, by driving her to despair about her own sense of reality. The young man turns to an older friend who concocts a scheme by which the former has to break off the engagement and abandons her, besmirching his own name as a dishonourable seducer, but in fact secretly rescuing her faith in the universal. This subterfuge is the only way he thinks his young friend will be able to undo the split in his own self that the love affair has caused, between the poetic and the actual. He will be able to walk away and repeat all the tumults and ecstasies of love at another time and another place.

Both the young man, and his older friend who is also the narrator of this story experience themselves as being excluded from the universal, a separation which does not contain

in itself the promise of a solution in the form of a higher unity. There is no imminent process like that performed by the Hegelian dialectic. Kierkegaard makes this clear when the narrator, Constantine Constantius meditates ironically on Hegel's dialectic calling it 'mediation'. He questions whether the first two terms of the dialectic, the positive (thesis) and negative (antithesis) can really in themselves contain the germs of a solution (synthesis). For that reason he rejects mediation entirely preferring the explicit concept of 'Repetition' which for him is unburdened by any false hopes of a universal higher stage of existence. Instead it Repetition is something arbitrarily and deliberately brought forth by the exceptional individual with the aim of creating and re-creating at will his own life as a series of complex aesthetic experiences and poetic ideas. (Whether this project for life is successful or not emerges in all its ambiguity in the novel, which is by turns humorous and tragic).

Søren Kierkegaard and
Regine Olsen



‘Mediation’ is a foreign word. ‘Repetition’ is a good Danish word, and I congratulate the Danish language for its contribution to philosophical terminology. It has not been explained in our own time how mediation comes about, whether it is a result of a movement of the two phases and in what sense it is already contained in them, or whether it appears as something new and, if so, how. (*Kierkegaard Repetition* [25] p. 18)

The narrator / mentor sees the young man as his protégé. He himself has tried to put his philosophy into practice many times with what degree of success emerges in the unfolding of the story.

In Hegel’s dialectic, each formation stands on the shoulders logically and temporally of the preceding one. The struggles of one phase of human existence are not repeated in exactly the same form in the next but instead are overcome but at the same time preserved. Hegel uses an ambiguous German word *Aufgehoben* and *Aufhebung* (from the verb *Aufheben*) to describe the process by which one phase gives way to the next. *Aufheben* ambiguously means to cancel, annul but at the same time to lift up, and preserve. The factors making up the contradictions of the previous stage are superseded but kept on into being as moments of the next emerging one. For Kierkegaard on the other hand, when it comes to fundamental human experiences – of love, despair and faith, each generation like each

individual is on its own. There is no advantage in having been born the heir of previous struggles. There is in fact no heir. We do not stand on the shoulders of our predecessors. Each individual / generation has an allotted task which is particular for it alone.

Whatever the one generation may learn from the other, that which is genuinely human no generation learns from the foregoing. In this respect every generation begins primitively, has no different task from that of every previous generation, nor does it get further, except in so far as the preceding generation shirked its task and deluded itself. This authentically human factor is passion, in which also the one generation perfectly understands the other and understands itself. Thus no generation has learned from another to love, no generation begins at any other point than at the beginning, no generation has a shorter task assigned to it than had the preceding generation, and if here one is not willing like the previous generations to stop with love but would go further, this is but idle and foolish talk. (*Kierkegaard Fear and Trembling* (1843))

In a subsequent article I want to explore in further detail what the concept of Repetition means for Kierkegaard, in particular the ways this concept is used in the novel of that name, and how these become expressions of his unique philosophy.

From the ‘Thought’ Series

By the Iraqi Artist Mohamed Mustafa Kamal



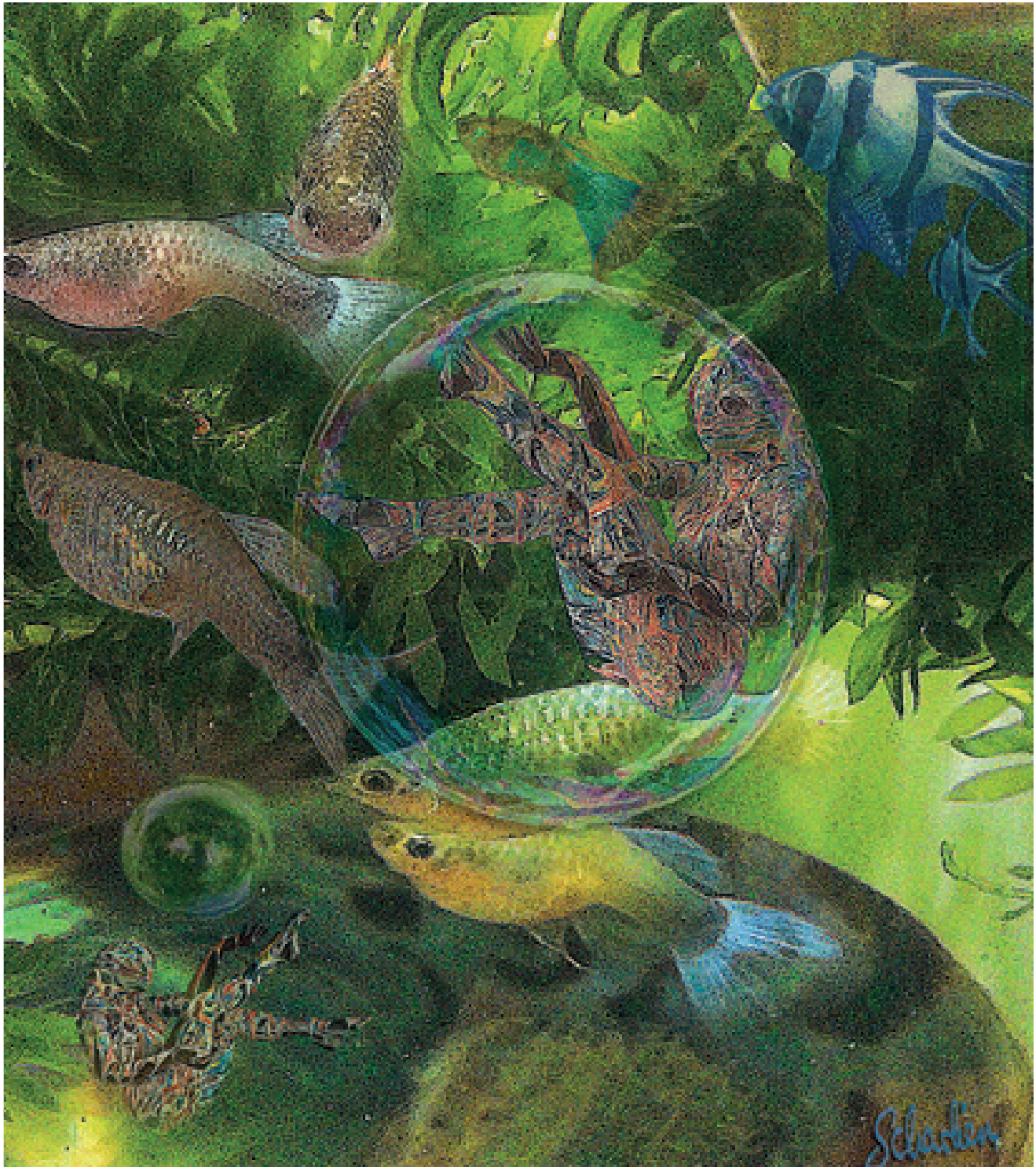
Thought Only

Thought only could not have
created those fish.

Nothing so inept as sheer passion
could have designed these intricate
patterns, the nacre shine of their bellies,
those tiny fins with their fluttering tendons
and near translucent bones, the fine
meshing of ganglia and vertebrae
in the chain of their glittering spine.

Watch their movement, the dance
of the blue flashing male, standing in the water
concentric in miniature to the minute eye.
Imagine the infinitesimal capillaries of
their pumping heart, the flawless
joining of the gills, the invisible
neural filaments through which their bodies
connect to their brain.

Then explain any idea or sentiment
contained in the making of such perfection.
Nothing could have created these miracles
than nature's unstoppable self-propagation
by a body's innate precision.
It is left to the vagaries of mind
to invent attraction or repulsion, fight or flight.



Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Saussure and his Influence

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 – 1913) is credited with being the father of modern linguistics and semiotics (the study of signs). He proposed a basic structure behind human communication, consisting of 'langue' and 'parole'.

PAUL COCKBURN

'Langue' is the system or structure that underlies language, a structure that is somehow created in us as human beings as we grow up and learn to talk and listen. It is a structure which enables us to speak and communicate with others who have an interpretative structure just like us, so that the words we speak mean something (hopefully what we want to say!) It is a basic, deep structure which can seemingly produce an infinite number of sentences and meanings.

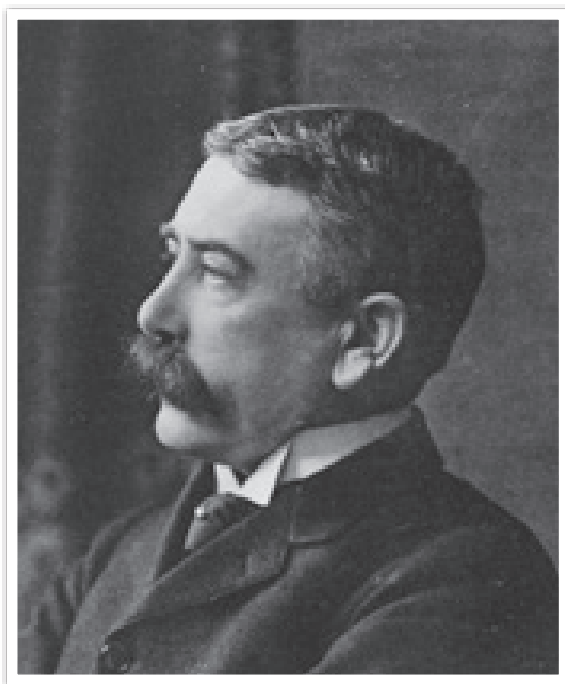
'Parole' is the speech we produce when we want to communicate with others. We have a physical larynx in our throat which we use to produce sounds. This layer of sounds is transmitted to others when we speak, enters their ears and is psychologically analysed by the interpreting structure of the 'other' so that they can understand what we have said. Once having thought of a suitable reply (say, if we have asked a question) they can then reply to us using their voice apparatus to address us. We then interpret what they have said, and so the conversation continues. The actual noises we make to signify an object, say a cup, form a sound-image, the signifier, which produces a psychological impression in the brain and mind of the receiver. The signifier is arbitrary: the word for hand in English is different from the word used in Arabic. Saussure introduced the idea that any sound-image could be used for any idea. The psychological impression is the signified, and includes all the associations that 'cup' entails: it can be used to drink from,

it has a handle etc. The signified can also be a more complicated concept or idea such as 'education', which although it does not have a direct referent still has meaning for the hearer.

The signifier and signified are united as a sign, and they are not confined to speech. In a text the signifiers are patterns we read on paper, so that writing is also a form of parole. And a no-entry sign on a road is also a sign.

In learning to speak, children do not just imitate the sounds their parents make, as they can come out with new sentences they have never heard before. There is a whole structure to language we somehow absorb, perhaps unconsciously. There is an implicit knowledge of a language which enables us to express ourselves to others. 'Language speaks through us, as do desire and society'. It is somehow part of the self, just as the self soaks up societal values and norms.

Saussure's approach to language was different from philology, which dominated linguistic studies in the nineteenth century in terms of studying how languages change over time and the relationship between languages. In his study of speech and the way language is actually used, Saussure emphasized the 'synchronic', the language which actually exists at a particular time, with all its specific cultural connections. Studying the diachronic, how language changes over time, Saussure thought was not so important. He writes:



Ferdinand de Saussure

'It is often claimed that there is nothing more important than knowing how a given state originated. In a certain sense that is true. The conditions that gave rise to the state throw light upon its true nature and prevent us from entertaining certain misconceptions. But what that proves is that diachrony has no end in itself. One might say, as has been said of journalism as a career, that it leads nowhere until you leave it behind.'

Although Wittgenstein probably never knew about Saussure's work, they do share common themes. Saussure likened language to chess, with the rules of the game being 'langue', and the actual moves in any game being like 'parole'.

Similarly, Wittgenstein writes about 'language games'. They both emphasize the poverty of an atomistic conception of language. The context of a word or sentence is key, and there are restrictions on how words are used together, the words in a sentence cannot be completely arbitrary or they will make no sense. Words are linked to one another in a sort of 'linguistic net'.

Saussure wrote in French, and he taught and

worked in Paris. His work had a significant impact on subsequent French philosophy. Saussure thought that in language 'there are only differences, with no positive terms. Identity is wholly a function of differences in the system'. The structuralists followed his theory that language is structured to also postulate that our myths, behavior, and culture are also all structured. This was the opposite of the freedom that Sartre espoused.

Maybe the opposition between structural determinism and freedom tie into another fundamental discourse: the passive and the active. Sometimes we are affected by forces outside of our control, other times we can actively choose and do what we want to do. This is reflected in our language in terms of the active and passive voice for verbs. It looks like the passive weakens my ego, and the active strengthens it, but it is not as simple as that. We can be strengthened by overcoming hardship. The trick is perhaps to have a positive attitude to life's vicissitudes, what life throws at you. It may seem as though tradition and culture form us in a seemingly passive way as we grow up, but the Sartrean view is that we can still stand out from them and find our own way.



CHRIS NORRIS

Just Read Aslant

It is always the same thing that makes happiness happiness: the ability to forget or, expressed in more scholarly fashion, the capacity to feel unhistorically during its duration.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Just read aslant and you'll not miss the signs.
Don't count on words to tell you what they mean.
If truth be told it's one that lies between
The thoughts, words, syllables: between the lines.

Stray fragments glimpsed beyond the memory-screen
Are all you have to go on now since mine's
A censor that reliably declines
Our craving to frequent that primal scene.

12 Don't credit those whose inner light divines,
Or so they say, such truths as we might glean
Only as fluttering ghosts in the machine
Or phantom pilgrims at deserted shrines.

They're memory's tributes to the might-have-been,

Its steering-clear of any light that shines
Too bright and preference for what combines
Thought's chiaroscuro with oblivion's sheen.

Don't blame me, please: if retrospect confines
Some details in selective quarantine
Then others may strike recollection clean
And clear as lately turned-up Valentines.

But then beware lest memory intervene
With some new hyperlink that re-entwines
Its scattered roots and swiftly undermines
Thought's work to stop them growing evergreen.



Scenes From Granada

DAVID BURRIDGE

Haute Couture

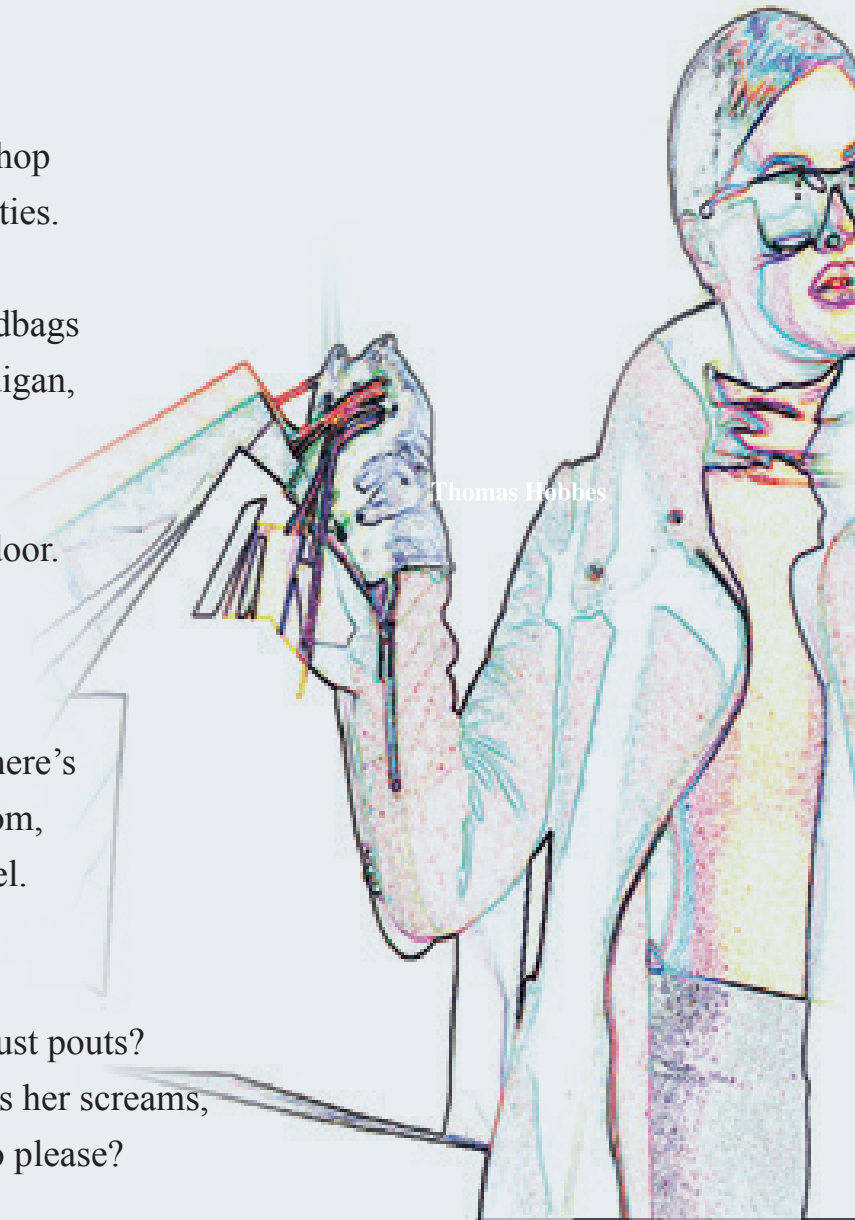
She has a pitch outside the fashion shop
In and out stride high-groomed beauties.
She crouches at their clicking heels.
Between the swings of designer handbags
I see her adjust her worn-thread cardigan,
holding up her cardboard sign.
Once it was Pesetas, now its Euros.
She prefers it here to the Cathedral door.

Siesta

Lying down in shuttered gloom.
In and out of wine stewed dreams, there's
a rising tide of sound beyond my room,
from a kitchen; Hades under the hotel.

A rankled contralto hits the decibels.
Is it the tiny Madonna who usually just pouts?
That basso profundo, who punctuates her screams,
is that the gent who always strives to please?

Who gave them Thor's hammer to hurl against the wall,
turned up the volume of their high octave soap opera
I make escape from my noise clad room
to enjoy my siesta in the empty streets.



A little further into Plato's Cave

DAVID JONES

In the cave simile, the cave dwellers are 'attached' to the physical (transitory) domain and their perceptions are limited to observing the movement of shadows of models (artificial images) of what a non-cave dweller would regard as 'real' objects. Moreover, the natural light from the Sun does not cast the shadows that the cave dwellers observe.

The shadows that the cave dwellers observe are cast by an 'artificial' light source inside the cave. The cave dweller's awareness is of shadows which is an absence of the (artificial) light. The artificial light is interrupted by an artificially made image of something real and the awareness of the observers who are 'attached' to the physical domain consists of seeing moving shadows, which is to see moving 'nothings' or moving 'interruptions' to the artificial light.

Human languages are the artificial modelling of things. Concepts separate (analyse) and isolate from the whole like shadows. Language is necessary for communication but the synthetic activity of thinking (seeing in the 'intelligible world') is not necessarily limited by language. Particular statements are only the corpse of a previously living thinking, like the ridged sea shells which were once secreted by living creatures. These words would remain a heap of dead husks but for a reader who has nurtured these words. Only the living inner activity of a reader can travel along the direction that they point towards in the intelligible domain.

The Wednesday

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Website: Currently unavailable

Published by:

The Wednesday Press, Oxford

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The Second Year

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